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THE SHADOW OF A NOBLE MAN: HONOR AND SHAME IN ARABIC PROVERBS

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# THE SHADOW OF A NOBLE MAN:

# HONOR AND SHAME IN ARABIC PROVERBS

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The shadow of a noble man is wide.

Arabic Proverb

O ye people of Muḥammad, it is upon you an obligation to protect honor and preserve nobility and generosity, for violation of honor is a barbarous crime -- there be nc one to perpetrate it except him who is stripped of religious faith; there be no one to commit it except him who is broke loose from shame and honor. For he is allied with the devil. The crime of violation of honor -- the angels of the heavens cry out from its perfidy and the fish of the sea and the fowl of the air curse its perpetrator. For the violation of honor is the sign of the wicked who leads men to atrocities in the world and to the torment of the fire in the hereafter.

From a *khutba* (sermon), Kufr al-Ma, Jordan.
Richard T. Antoun, "On the Modesty of Women in Arab Muslim Villages: A Study in the Accomodation of Traditions," *American Anthropologist* 70 (1968), 686.

To S.Y.A.,
whose shadow is wider than space or time.

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this dissertation is to evaluate the link between the contents of a major art form, the proverb, and ethnographic reality *vis à vis* honor and shame in Arab culture. The emphasis is on the context of cultural meaning as opposed to the context of interaction. A second consideration is whether well-known collections of Arabic proverbs available in English translation are reliable sources of data for folkloristic analyses of cultural expression. Items for analysis were culled from ten published collections of colloquial proverbs ranging geographically from Morocco to Iraq and spanning more than a century of work by native and non-native collectors. The substance -- the literal evaluation of behavior or states contributing to honor or shame -- was the criterion for selection of individual proverbs. Of a total corpus of 10,332 proverbs, a surprisingly small number were found explicitly relevant to honor/shame or closely related concepts such as generosity/stinginess, good/bad reputation, family, and so on. These 105 items were then analyzed in relation to ethnographic data on the honor/shame complex and peripheral concepts. A high, although not perfect, correlation was found between meaning in the proverbs, behaviors recorded in ethnographic literature, and such organizational aspects of culture as religion, family, hospitality and revenge. Inconsistent messages were expressed in proverbs concerning daughters, family ties, and secrecy, which are emotionally-charged and ambiguous areas

of the culture. The proverbs are expressive of cultural ambiguities and provide a traditional means of supporting either side of an argument. Finally, the English translations used for this study appear to render accurately the traditional Arab view of honor and shame as integral measures of human worth.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

# LIST OF TABLES

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

Content analysis is one of the most productive means of investigating folkloric expression. Formal studies of content seek to determine structural components of items and the rules by which they are combined to produce meaningful and "correct" expressive forms within particular traditions. Beyond such structural analyses, insights into the meaning of folklore can be gained through the study of the *substance,* "what is manifestly stated in the message," and the *condition,* "such notions as the truth, emotional, and aesthetic values of the segments"[2] of expressive forms.

Bedouin culture is often seen by Arabs, with a sort of romantic nostalgia, as the source of Arab ethical values and folkloric expression, particularly verbal art. The primary mode of artistry among Arabs, nomadic and sedentary, is language; the major factor influencing the the evaluation of behavior is the concept of honor. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the link between the contents of a major art form, the proverb, and ethnographic reality *vis à vis* honor and shame in Arab culture. The focus is on the substantive and conditional messages of selected Arabic colloquial proverbs. The object is not to provide an exhaustive examination of proverbs but to survey a sampling of data in order to ascertain whether accurate analogies can be drawn between be-

havioral aspects of culture as shown in ethnographies and ideational aspects as depicted in proverbs. Richard Bauman has enumerated various types of context with which folklorists frequently concern themselves[3]; the major emphasis here is on the context of cultural meaning as opposed to the context of interaction. A second consideration is whether certain well-known collections of Arabic proverbs available in English translation are reliable sources of data for folkloristic analysis of cultural expression.

## Collections: A Data Source

Items for analysis were drawn from ten published collections[4] of colloquial proverbs ranging geographically from Morocco to Iraq and spanning more than a century of work by native and non-native collectors. The substance -- the literal evaluation of behavior or states contributing to honor or shame -- was the criterion for selection of individual proverbs. Two factors were primary in the choice of collections: first, all are widely cited in the literature on Arabic folklore, and second, all are accessible to English-speaking folklorists. In addition to those basic considerations, each collection is evaluated below on the basis of nine criteria: 1) national or regional identity of the set, 2) number of items, 3) arrangement, 4) acknowledgement of sources, 5) citation of parallel proverbs and/or literature in Arabic and/or other languages, 6) ethnographical and contextual information, 7) presentation of proverbs in Arabic script, and 9) translation.

The oldest collection of those used here is John Lewis Burckhardt's *Arabic Proverbs; or, The Manners and Customs of the Modern*

*Egyptians*. Burckhardt, son of a well-to-do Swiss family, fell within the tradition of European adventurers traveling in Africa and the Middle East under the auspices of various societies interested in the "unexplored" (by Westerners) areas of the world. In Burckhardt's case, the sponsoring group was English, the Association for Promoting the Discovery of the Interior of Africa; they sent young Burckhardt, then 25 years old, to Africa with the aim of approaching the Niger basin via overland caravan routes from Egypt and other parts of North Africa to Fezzan and Timbuctu. In the remaining eight years of his life, Burckhardt traveled extensively, gathering rich ethnographic and topographical material from areas yet little known to Westerners. He called himself "Sheikh Ibrahīm" and is referred to thus in the writings of various British travelers in the area.

Burckhardt's collection of 782 items arranged in Arabic alphabetical order consists of proverbs collected by the author during his travels and periods of residence in Egypt between 1809 and 1817. These he arranged around a "nucleus of an early 18th century collection" of proverbs by one Sheikh Sharaf ad-Dīn Ibn Asad, which he says he found "written upon nine or ten leaves in the common-place book of a sheikh, with whom he was acquainted in this city...."[5] To Ibn Asad's collection Burckhardt added "some hundreds, committed to paper as he [Burckhardt] heard them quoted in general society or in the bázár."[6] By May 1817 Burckhardt had sent a copy of his Sinai travel journal to Sir Joseph Bankes, followed in June by his collection of Cairene "popular sayings" to the Reverend William Hamilton. Burckhardt died in October 1817 at

the age of 33; *Arabic Proverbs* appeared thirteen years later under the editorship of Sir William Ouseley.

Burckhardt claims to have had 999 items in his collection; in fact, he makes a point of leaving the odd number, "adopting here the notion prevalent among Arabs, that even numbers are unlucky and that any thing [*sic*] perfect in its quantity is particularly affected by the evil eye."[7] The lower actual count appears, according to Ouseley, to result from errors in numbering the text.

The proverbs are presented in unvowelled Arabic script with no transliteration; the English translations are then given, along with a great deal of linguistic and situational explanation, but without cross-references to proverbs in either Arabic or other languages. Censorship of the material was practiced by both Burckhardt and Ouseley; Burckhardt, in his own words, "omitted a considerable number, many being altogether uninteresting, and others so grossly indelicate that he could not venture to lay them before the public...."[8] Ouseley, in turn, adds that "where his [Burckhardt's] translation of certain items or phrases...appeared more literal than decent, it has been endeavored by circumlocution to express sense without offending delicacy."[9] C.E. Bosworth, in his "Introduction," expresses the opinion that, "With today's more liberal outlook, we may regret that Burckhardt excluded from his collection some of the more earthy and racy proverbs, for vigorous expression is the quintessence of an effective proverb...."[10] Overall, however, Burckhardt's is one of the better collections of Arabic proverbs available in English translation.

James Richard Jewett had been, in 1886, a Fellow of Harvard College studying in Syria. He collected "three or four hundred proverbs in the common dialect,"[11] of which he sent fifty to the American Oriental Society; they published 43 of them in the *Proceedings* of that year. Seven years later, in 1893, Jewett published 291 items under the title "Arabic Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases, Collected, Translated and Annotated" in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society*. Jewett wrote that these proverbs were "for the most part handed to me in writing by various friends,"[12] after which he gave them to his assistant, Yusuf Nasr, "at whose dictation I wrote them in transliteration."[13] He then checked Nasr's version with three Syrian teachers, noting when an item was not known to them or when a variant was known. Jewett's work is, then, thorough in its presentation of the proverbs in Arabic script, transliteration, and variation as given by his informants and assistants, as well as cross-references to other collections of Arabic proverbs. Of his English translations Jewett writes that "literalness rather than elegance has been aimed at"[14]; when the meaning remains obscure, he supplements the translation with explanation.

Jewett was not insensitive to the importance of context in proverb studies. He provides ethnographic explanations as well as hypothetical performance contexts, noting that "some of the explanations were given me by natives on the spot, and in some cases I have given without native authority what seemed to be the obvious meaning of the proverb or proverbial phrase under consideration."[15] He also reports making use of notes given to him by a Syrian scholar and poet, Ibrahim Hourani.[16]

The major shortcoming of Jewett's work is its arrangement, or more precisely, lack of logical arrangement; he did not attempt to organize the proverbs "according to subjects or otherwise" because "it seemed that such an arrangement would not add to the usefulness of the collection."[17] On the contrary, arrangement by subject greatly expedites the use of collections by scholars interested in content. Nonetheless, Jewett's work is thoroughly documented and carefully presented, and therefore a useful tool for the student of Arabic proverbs.

A volume entitled *Arabic Proverbs*, collected by Mrs. A.P. Singer and edited by the well-known German folklorist Enno Littmann, appeared in 1913. The 169 proverbs included in this work were collected by Mrs. Singer in Syria, Egypt and the Sudan, where she had lived, according to Littmann, "for a considerable length of time" during which she "had from time to time written down the Arabic sayings which she had heard used among the people with whom she lived...."[18] The work in its published form bears no statement by Mrs. Singer of her purpose in collecting the proverbs; Littmann, however, apparently regards it as a step toward "a complete *corpus* of Arabic proverbs systematically arranged" which would be useful for writing "a real history of the Oriental proverb" and for the study of "Eastern civilization" and "Eastern psychology."[19]

The arrangement of Singer's collection seems to be arbitrary despite Littmann's call for systematic arrangement. The main text contains the proverbs transliterated and translated; they appear in Arabic script in the back of the book. Littmann provides extensive explanations on the meaning of each proverb but there is no mention of performance contexts. The proverbs in Mrs. Singer's manuscript, says Littmann,

were "checked" with a single Egyptian Arabic speaker and his variant used when it differed from the data. Most of those proverbs not known to Littmann's assistant were designated as Sudanese or Syrian on the basis of dialect; a few items remain unidentified as to provenience. There is no mention of what happened to any Egyptian proverbs not in the assistant's repertoire. Littmann gives two forms of a few items, and also cross-references material on Arabic proverbs. By tampering with the material and "correcting" form, Littmann has compromised some of the collection's strength as a presentation of data from three distinct parts of the Arab World; overall, however, Singer's is a useful work.

Perhaps the most thorough of the collections available in English is Edward A. Westermarck's *Wit and Wisdom in Morocco: A Study of Native Proverbs*, which appeared in 1930 as the third book in Westermarck's trilogy on "the customs and ideas of the Moors."[20] The three books, *Marriage Ceremonies in Morocco* and *Ritual and Belief in Morocco*, published in 1914 and 1926 respectively, and *Wit and Wisdom* are based on the author's nine years residence in North Africa during the course of thirty years.

Westermarck was a noted scholar, having written extensively not only on the Moroccan material but on such topics as *The History of Human Marriage*[21] and *The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas*[22]; the latter, theoretically in line with British social Darwinism of the period, like Westermarck's other works, was an important contribution to social anthropology. Born in Sweden in 1862, Westermarck was educated at the University of Helsingfors and later served as Professor of Philosophy at that institution and as Professor of Sociology at London University.

Included in *Wit and Wisdom* are 2,013 items collected mainly in Tangier, although some 400 are from Andjra and other parts of Morocco. The proverbs are arranged according to "subjects or situations on which they have a bearing"[23]; they are presented in Maghrebī-style Arabic script, English translation and transliteration, which Westermarck discusses in detail on pages 54 through 63 of the "Introduction." Despite Westermarck's excellent scholarship and his thorough cross-references to other Moroccan material, he writes that he has "refrained from all comparison between proverbs recorded by others and those collected by myself"[24] and foregone references "because my aim has been, in the first place to collect facts by sociological field-work in Morocco, and in the second place to study those facts from points of view which differ essentially from that of him who examines their distribution."[25] In fact, Westermarck's point of view anticipates the major concerns of contemporary contextual folklorists. He clearly recognizes the importance of context in the study of proverbs, discussing his data in terms of both socio-cultural and immediate context, as well as providing additional specific elaboration with some proverbs. Westermarck's is an excellent piece of work.

The most questionable collection of this set, in terms of value as a scholarly tool, is Selwyn Gurney Champion's 1938 publication entitled *Racial Proverbs: A Selection of the World's Proverbs.* This collection, although extensive, is poorly documented, yet it boasts, for proverbs from the Arab World, introductory remarks by the well-known scholars H.A.R. Gibb[26] and Edward A. Westermarck.[27] Nevertheless, Champion provides only English renderings of all proverbs in his volume,

with no ethnographic, contextual or comparative information. He does acknowledge a lengthy list of published sources and translators, but does not tie them to particular proverbs.

There are a total of 1303 proverbs included under headings of interest here. In the section on "Asia" we find 632 items under the title "Arabic (Including Bedouin, Druse, Iraq, Mesopotamian, and Syrian)." Here in one fell swoop Champion has blurred distinctions between regional groups (Mesopotamian), national groups (Iraq -- not even in adjective form -- and Syrian), and groups whose identities are based on mode of subsistence (Bedouins) or religion (Druse). The other sections of interest for us fall under the continental classification "Africa." These include eight items under "Algerian-Arabic (Algeria and Morocco)"; 245 items under "Egyptian-Arabic (Including Babylonian and Copt)"; 364 items under "Moorish (Western Arabic and Berber)"; 39 items under "Sudanese-Arabic"; fifteen items under "Tunisian-Arabic." It is not clear how Morocco came to be split between the Algerians and the "Moors," nor how the Babylonians came to be in Egypt. Nevertheless, the entire book is arranged in this manner, that is, by continent, then group (national, ethnic or linguistic), then alphabetically by a "catchword" in the English translation. In addition, there is a section on "Religions" which includes 55 items under the heading "Islam: The Koran." It is not made clear, however, whether these are *hadīths* or Qurānic. Although certain expressions are widely-known *hadīths*, such as "Seek knowledge even in China" and "Paradise lies under the feet of mothers," specific sources and identities of "proverbs" in the "Islam"

section are not cited. Overall, Champion's book is a confusing hodge-podge, of minimal use mainly for its general list of published sources and for suggesting proverbs which can be verified in better documented works.

H.R.P. Dickson did not set out to study Arabic proverbs. His book *The Arab of the Desert: A Glimpse into Badawin life in Kuwait and Sau'di Arabia*, published in 1951, does, however, include forty proverbs "taken at random from a collection I have made" in various parts of Arabia, mainly Kuwait.[28] Dickson was a British political officer posted in Kuwait, and apparently heard the proverbs which he presents in conversation with Bedouins and townsmen; some items are attributed to specific informants.

Although *The Arab of the Desert* is ostensibly an ethnographic study, it lacks a theoretical perspective. The proverbs, while given in Arabic script and English translation, are inconsistently transliterated; 21 are poorly rendered, apparently in literary rather than colloquial Arabic, and nineteen have no transliteration. Dickson does not cross-reference his work with other collections nor cite variants. The book is clearly an ethnography for popular rather than academic consumption; still, it contains some valuable information on the Bedouins, particularly of Kuwait.

Anis Frayha's collection of Lebanese proverbs is one of the most widely cited and best collections of Arabic proverbs with English translation. First published in 1953 under the title *Modern Lebanese Proverbs*, the work reappeared as *A Dictionary of Modern Lebanese Proverbs* in 1974. Frayha collected his 4,248 proverbs from "People's daily con-

versation" in Ras al-Matn, a small predominantly Druze village east of Beirut. Although Frayha does give cross-references to other Arabic collections from Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Palestine, Egypt and Transjordan as well as limited ethnographic and contextual information, he comments:

> Those who insist, in historic and scientific works, upon documentation and citation will be disappointed in finding nothing of this sort in this work. Nevertheless, we believe that living men and women are the best authentic source for collecting proverbs, determining their true pronunciation and meaning.[29]

The proverbs are given in partially vowelled Arabic script and in translation; Frayha recognizes the desirability of transliteration "for the sake of dialectology" but says that it was impossible due to the available printing facilities. He has retained some of his predecessors' concerns with "indelicate" material, although not to the extent of censoring it. He writes that "We must apologize to the reader for the inclusion of objectionable proverbs. But in a collection of proverbs which claims completeness, and for the sake of sociological and psychological studies, it was deemed necessary to include the 'smutty' ones."[30] Overall, Frayha's collection, arranged in Arabic alphabetical order, is a valuable compendium of colloquial proverbs collected in the field, thoroughly cross-referenced internally, and given in a format which makes it useful for folklore scholarship.

Two collections which appeared in 1968 are included here. In that year, Mohamed Abdelkafi published *One Hundred Arabic Proverbs from Libya*. Abdelkafi's aim, as he describes it, is "to introduce to non-Arab readers a representative selection"[31] of Libyan proverbs, although he fails to indicate what makes these specific proverbs "representative."

Abdelkafi's proverbs are presented in arbitrary order, with unvowelled Arabic script, no transliteration, a literal translation and, in some cases, a discussion of the meaning in addition to the translation. He gives a fair amount of ethnographic explanation, little contextual data, and no acknowledgement of sources, although he says that these proverbs are current in Libya. There are no cross-references to other Arabic collections or variants, although the author includes what he refers to as "equivalent" English proverbs. The main virtue of the collection is in providing Libyan Arabic proverb texts with translation; the lack of specific information regarding the actual collection of the proverbs is, however, a major shortcoming.

Fatma M. Mahgoub's *A Linguistic Study of Cairene Proverbs*, also published in 1968, is, as the title indicates, not intended as a folkloristic collection. Mahgoub's concern is with external and formal characteristics of the proverbs. Nevertheless, based as it is on "900 proverbs current in contemporary Cairene colloquial Arabic...reproduced from memory,"[32] the work makes available some valuable raw data in addition to a wealth of information on style, phonology, morphology and syntax, as well as current usage. While the proverbs are not written in Arabic script, they are rendered in careful phonemic transliteration and English translation. Mahgoub also checked her repertoire against other collections, including those of Burckhardt and Champion.

The most recent of our collections is *Lebanon: Proverbs and Maxims*, published by Jean Gabril in 1972. Gabril's purpose appears to be akin to that of Abdelkafi of introducing Arab culture, through proverbs, to non-Arabs. He writes: "I tried my best to choose only those

proverbs and wise sayings which were capable of interesting the foreign reader by their exotic flavour or by the faithful image which they give of the Lebanese genius in particular and of the Arab and Mideastern genius in general."[33] Gabril presents his 486 items in Arabic alphabetical order by the first letter, not by the root as is more common. They are in unvowelled Arabic script accompanied by translations into English, French and Spanish. However, he cites no sources, parallels or ethnographic or contextual information. Thus, again like Abdelkafi's Libyan collection, the main value of Gabril's work is in giving a number of proverbs with Arabic script which can be used as data, particularly for content analysis.

The major considerations when utilizing collections such as the ones described and used here have to do with reliability of the individual works and consistency among the group. Reliability rests on the fundamental question, Can we trust someone else's data? This question in turn relates specifically to scholarly rigor as applied by the author/collector to the work, and the presentation of the data in published form. The foregoing discussion (pages 2 through 16) illustrates strengths and shortcomings of the individual collections (see also Table 1), from which we can move to a few summary observations.

The ten collections used for this dissertation are for the most part useful data sources so long as their limitations are borne in mind. In some cases, the collectors have notified their readers that certain selection processes were applied; Burckhardt's translations are altered in the name of "decency," Abdelkafi and Gabril seek to make "representative selections" which would interest foreign readers, and

TABLE 1

USABILITY OF COLLECTIONS

| Collection | Identity | Items | Accessible | Source cited | Arabic X Refs | Other X Refs | Ethnographic Data | Contextual Data | Arabic script | Transliteration | Translation | Censored | Altered |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Burckhardt, *Arabic Proverbs* | Egyptian | 782 | % | + | - | - | + | + | + | + | + | + | - |
| Jewett, "Arabic Proverbs..." | Syrian | 291 | - | + | + | - | + | + | + | + | + | + | - |
| Singer, *Arabic Proverbs* | Egyptian Syrian Sudanese | 169 | - | + | + | - | + | - | + | + | + | ? | + |
| Westermarck, *Wit & Wisdom* | Moroccan | 2013 | + | + | + | - | + | + | + | + | + | - | - |
| Champion, *Racial Proverbs* | Mixed | 1303 | % | % | - | - | % | - | - | - | + | ? | ? |
| Dickson, *Arab of the Desert* | Kuwaiti | 40 | * | % | - | - | + | % | - | % | + | + | - |
| Frayha, *Modern Lebanese* | Lebanese | 4248 | - | + | + | - | + | + | + | - | + | - | - |
| Abdelkafi, *100 Proverbs* | Libyan | 100 | - | - | - | - | + | % | + | - | + | - | ? |
| Mahgoub, *Linguistic* | Egyptian | 900 | - | + | + | - | + | + | - | + | + | ? | - |
| Gabril, *Lebanon* | Lebanese | 486 | - | - | - | - | - | - | + | - | + | ? | ? |

Key to symbols: + = yes - = no % = inconsistent ? = unknown * = unimportant

Jewett and Dickson have published portions of larger collections they claim to have made. We can be fairly certain that Westermarck and Frayha have not consciously censored their materials to conform to any particular criteria, although of course we have no way of knowing whether, by design or oversight, some items fell by the wayside. There is no mention of intentional censorship in the collections of Singer or Champion, but also no indication that they are not censored.

Of course, the hazards of incomplete data exist with any folkloristic study, whether based on fieldwork by the analyst or by others. Since variation is one of the hallmarks of folklore, it is virtually impossible ever to claim a "complete" collection, and the absence of something in the available data does not prove that is does not exist. In the case of the present study, it is not claimed that the proverb corpus at hand is a "complete" set of Arabic proverbs; nevertheless, utilization of a number of collections expands the available data and reduces the danger of missing significant information.

Aside from censorship of either the data itself or the translations, there is also the question of whether the data has been tampered with. The most blatant incident of such alteration is in the case of Singer's collection, parts of which Littman "corrected" to conform to his assistant's repertoire. Although they claim to be presenting authentic colloquial proverbs, one cannot but be a little suspicious as well of Champion, Abdelkafi and Gabril, as their motives suggest that "minor" alterations might be seen to support stereotyped and "exotic" elements of culture with which they concern themselves; there is, however, no overt evidence that they have altered data, and the content of

proverbs in their collections appears to be consistent with that of more trusted collections, such as Westermarck's and Frayha's. Even Littmann's tampering does not seriously affect the usefulness of Singer's *Arabic Proverbs* for content analysis, since the changes seem to be strictly linguistic.

In the final analysis, then, we can choose to trust or not trust data collected by others on the bases of documentation, stated purpose, completeness of presentation (i.e., inclusion of native-language text, translation, cross-references, ethnographic and contextual information, etc.), and consistency within the collection itself and among collections. The best of the ten works examined here are undoubtedly Westermarck's *Wit and Wisdom in Morocco* and Frayha's *Modern Lebanese Proverbs,* as they are large and therefore more "complete" than many other works; in addition, the authors supplement the data with cross-references and ethnographic and contextual notes. Furthermore, they give the Arabic text as well as the translation, making their data accessible to non-Arabic speakers as well as enabling those who can to verify the translations or to compare variants in the original language. Burckhardt's *Arabic Proverbs* is a close runner-up for the same reasons, although it is quite a bit smaller a collection and the translations are "cleaned up." Jewett's "Arabic Proverbs" and Mahgoub's *Linguistic Study* are quite useful, although the former also censors his work for "decency." Singer's *Arabic Proverbs* is a good source of material for content analysis, although Littmann's alterations of course limit some of its applications. Abdelkafi's *One Hundred Arabic Proverbs* and Gabril's *Lebanon* are of moderate usefulness; they provide some data but are poorly docu-

mented and based upon suspect motives. Dickson's *Arab of the Desert* is of limited utility for the study of proverbs since it contains only forty items, is inconsistent in presentation and undocumented. Finally, Champion's relevent portion of *Racial Proverbs* is a starting point as it presents a large number of Arabic proverbs, but must be used in conjunction with other works because it is in translation only and is poorly documented. The following analysis procedes, then, in light of the limitations of printed collections of Arabic proverbs.

## Oral Literature in Arab Culture

The Arab World is a rich and intricate blend of elements. Like a carpet from the looms of Hijaz, the tapestry of Arab culture is woven of diverse ethnic, religious, linguistic and historical threads. Each area constitutes a motif in the composite pattern, its shape determined by multiple factors: pre-Islamic characteristics and history; interaction with non-Arab and non-Muslim peoples; linguistic and ethnic variation within the area. But in spite of the considerable diversity, there remains overall cultural continuity among the people who call themselves Arabs, much of which is based on emotional links between the nomadic Bedouins and other Arabs.[34]

A love of verbal expression has long been characteristic of Arab culture. Oral poetry flourished during the *Jāhilīya*[35] among both nomadic and sedentary Arabs, and with the birth and rapid proliferation of Islām, Arabic poetry, both sacred and secular, continued its popularity among conquerers and conquered alike. Formulaic expression is an essential component of verbal art among the Arabs[36], although great

emphasis is also placed on verbatim memorization of oral and written literature. This is especially true among Muslim Arabs, for whom memorization of at least portions of the Qurān is extremely widespread; it is not uncommon for Muslims to commit the entire holy scripture to memory.

Of the numerous formulaic forms in the Arabic language, probably the most pervasive is the proverb. There are a great many proverbs in both classical Arabic and the dialects. As Dickson observed earlier in this century, "The Arab is forever quoting proverbs or sayings of some poet or other, and he seems to enjoy this almost as much as story telling."[37] Abdelkafi writes that "one might claim that [the Arabs] make more use of proverbs than most other nations."[38]

Robert A. Barakat suggests that the wide use and dissemination of Arabic proverbs may be attributable to several factors inherent in Muslim and non-Muslim Arab society and culture.[39] Respect for linguistic prowess is a long-standing characteristic of the Arabs, the most widely known example being the poetic duels of tribal and court poets, both pre- and post-*Hijra*.[40] Similarly, Arabs take "vast pride...in being able to invoke proverbs when the need arises" and pay great respect to "any person who is capable of using these sayings correctly."[41] The judgment concerning "proper" usage is based on two criteria: sufficient familiarity with proverbs to enable a person spontaneously to evoke an appropriate proverb, and skill in correct application of a proverb to the situation at hand. The respected Arabic proverb performer has both an extensive repertoire of readily recalled proverbs and a sense of appropriateness and timing.

Dickson notes in reference to proverb use among Bedouins that "Not only does this practice give spice to conversation, but the person quoting clever sayings, and so forth, knows that he gains in the estimation of his fellows for showing himself a scholar and well read."[42] Dickson's characterization of Bedouins as well-read scholars is somewhat misleading in view of the high level of illiteracy among them, particularly two decades ago when he wrote; nevertheless, as Barakat points out, learning or wisdom is greatly admired in Arab culture, although it need not necessarily be derived from institutionalized instruction.[43] Coupled with the reverence which Arabs have for their history and traditions, this respect for wisdom helps explain the frequency of proverb use in the culture, for the proverb is the linguistic embodiment of traditional wisdom. Like proverbs in other cultures, Arabic proverbs, in Barakat's words, "bear the stamp of approval from tradition and are thought to express best one's thoughts on many occasions."[44] Current situations are simplified and made familiar by proverbial expression; decisions are made more weighty by proverbial opinion.

H.A.R. Gibb suggests that the widespread use of proverbs in general conversation "in the East as in the West" has been dealt a fatal blow by the influence of "modern" -- meaning Western -- education, and that "the younger generation are rapidly losing their father's memory of and taste for proverbs."[45] Without accurate contextual data on current use of proverbs in Arab society it is impossible to make any firm judgments, but Gibb's point is debatable in light of available evidence. To begin with, Gibb rests his assertion on an implicit assumption of decreased illiteracy due to the proliferation of formal education in the

Arab World. In fact, while the ranks of the educated have increased in recent decades, the number of illiterate people has also increased in many places because population grows faster than the educational system.[46] Furthermore, Arabic proverbs are used as a device in modern literature; Khalil Risk, for one, discusses this phenomenon in his recent dissertation.[47] As for conversational contexts, Mahgoub reports that traditional performance of proverbs is in fact still common; she says that subjects in their 20's were found to quote proverbs in their ordinary speech without knowing they were under observation[48], although she does not indicate the educational level of these subjects. Thus, while it is possible (although far from certain) that conversational use of proverbs by Western-educated young Arabs has decreased, these same individuals remain passive (and possibly active) bearers of proverbs as folkloric items and active bearers of colloquial proverbs as literary devices. In addition, because a large proportion of the overall population remains illiterate, it is likely that proverbs have remained both viable and vital in contemporary Arab societies.

NOTES

[1]Robert Plant Armstrong, "Content Analysis in Folkloristics," *Trends in Content Analysis*, ed. Ithiel de Sola Pool (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1959), 153.

[2]*Ibid.*

[3]Richard Bauman, "The Field Study of Folklore in Context," *Handbook of American Folklore*, ed. Richard M. Dorson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 363-366.

[4]Proverb number 84 appeared as a footnote in Gideon Kressel, "Sorocide/Filiacide: Homocide for Family Honor," *Current Anthropology* 22 (1981): 143.

[5]John Lewis Burckhardt, "Translator's Preface," *Arabic Proverbs; or, The Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, 3rd ed. (London: Curzon Press, 1972), iv.

[6]*Ibid.*

[7]*Ibid.*, vi.

[8]*Ibid.*, iv.

[9]Sir William Ouseley, "Note of the Editor," in Burckhardt, *Arabic Proverbs*: viii.

[10]C.E. Bosworth, "Introduction," in Burckhardt, *Arabic Proverbs*, iii.

[11]American Oriental Society, *Proceedings* 13 (1886): cxxix.

[12] James Richard Jewett, "Arabic Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases, Collected, Translated and Annotated," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 15 (1891): 28.

[13]*Ibid.*

[14]*Ibid.*

[15]*Ibid.*, 29-30.

[16]*Ibid.*, 30.

[17]*Ibid.*, 29.

[18]Enno Littmann, "Preface," *Arabic Proverbs* by Mrs. A.P. Singer (Cairo: F. Diemer, 1913), iii.

[19]*Ibid.*, vii.

[20]Edward A. Westermarck, *Wit and Wisdom in Morocco: A Study of Native Proverbs* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1930), v.

[21](London: Macmillan, 1891).

[22](London and New York: Macmillan, 1906-08).

[23]Westermarck, *Wit,* 43.

[24]*Ibid.*, 47.

[25]*Ibid.*

[26]H.A.R. Gibb, "Introduction to the Proverbs of Arabia," *Racial Proverbs: A Selection of the World's Proverbs*, ed. Selwyn Gurney Champion (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1938), xxxvii-xxxix.

[27]Edward A. Westermarck, "Introduction to the Proverbs of Morocco," *Racial Proverbs*, ed. Champion, lxxvi-lxxix.

[28]H.R.P. Dickson, "Some Proverbs and Sayings," *The Arab of the Desert: A Glimpse into Badawin Life in Kuwait and Sau'di Arabia*, 2nd ed. (London: Allen and Unwin, 1951), 336-339.

[29]Anis Frayha, *Modern Lebanese Proverbs*, 2 vols. (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1953), v.

[30]*Ibid.*, vii.

[31]Mohamed Abdelkafi, *One Hundred Arabic Proverbs from Libya* (London: Vernon and Yates, 1968), viii.

[32]Fatma M. Mahgoub, *A Linguistic Study of Cairene Proverbs* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968), 5.

[33]Jean Gabril, *Lebanon: Proverbs and Maxims* (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-Lubnani,1972), 9.

[34] ee, for example, Joseph Sadan, "The 'Nomad versus Sedentary' Framework in Arabic Literature," *Fabula* 15 (1974): 59-86; Michael E. Meeker, *Literature and Violence in North Arabia* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

[35]The *Jāhilīya* means the "Time of Ignorance," that is, the pre-Islamic era in the Arabian Peninsula.

[36]See James T. Monroe, "Oral Composition in Pre-Islamic Poetry," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 3 (1972): 1-53.

[37]Dickson, "Some Proverbs," 336.

[38]Abdelkafi, *One Hundred*, vii.

[39]Robert A. Barakat, *A Contextual Study of Arabic Proverbs* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1980), FF Communication, No. 226, 7.

[40]The *Hijra*, "Migration," refers to the Prophet Muhammad's escape from Mecca to Medina in 622 C.E. The Islamic calendar dates from that time.

[41]Barakat, *Contextual*, 7.

[42]Dickson, "Some Proverbs," 336.

[43]Barakat, *Contextual,* 8.

[44]*Ibid.*, 11.

[45]Gibb, "Introduction," xxxix.

[46]Literacy rates for the Arab countries in 1984 varied from 12% in North Yemen to 80% in Kuwait. See *The World Almanac and Book of Facts 1984* (New York: Newspaper Enterprise Association, 1984). Because of increased population, however, the 300,000 people who comprise the 20% illiterate of Kuwait nearly equal in number the 322,000 total population of that country in 1964. The same principle holds true throughout the Arab World; in fact, the current illiterate populations in some countries (Bahrain, Iraq, Libya, Mauretania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, U.A.E., South Yemen) exceeds the total populations of those countries twenty years ago.

[47]Khalil Shukrallah Risk, "The Poetry of ᶜAbd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī: Thematic and Stylistic Study," (Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1981), 186.

[48]Mahgoub, *Linguistic*, 2.

CHAPTER II

# THE ARAB WORLD: CONTINUITY AND DIVERSITY

## What is an Arab?

The "Arab World" is at first glance easy to define. Yet a more prolonged gaze into the elements of which the Arab World is composed reveals an intricate maze of details which purport to define the "Arab" but which differ significantly from one group to the next and one part of the region to another. "Arab" is neither a religious nor a racial, a linguistic nor a national designation, although all of those factors contribute to the total picture. It is a term used by both those who consider themselves Arabs and those who do not. Hence some working understanding of the term "Arab" is essential, in part because we intend to examine Arabic proverbs and in part because of the ever more prominent position occupied by Arabs in the international eye.

The large number of nations and the concommitantly extensive geographical area which they inhabit is one of the most obvious characteristics of Arabs as a group.[1] They comprise the majority populations of twenty-one nations of the Middle East and North Africa, and contribute to minority populations of many other countries of the Old and New Worlds as well.[2] Size alone prohibits homogeneity within the group and, although certain cultural factors are relatively constant from Morocco to Iraq, there are also many differences among Arab societies. Further-

more, there is considerable overlapping of cultural regions, and Arab aspects of society have syncretized with indigenous factors wherever Arab and non-Arab met, so that the cultural mixtures vary from place to place.

Most Arabs speak some dialect of Arabic as their mother tongue, and although this fact is often used as a minimal criterion in defining "the Arab,"[3] it also ignores the emigrant's child or grandchild who does not speak Arabic and yet claims Arab identity. Perhaps the most fruitful approach is to conceive of Arabs as individuals who possess all or some of a combination of traits which make them consider themselves Arabs and who, as Richard Weekes suggests, "identify with the heritage of the Arabs and those cultural values and aspirations unique to Arabs whether they be Moroccan or Syrian, Christian or Muslim, farmer or businessman,"[4] or, categories which he omits, native or expatriot. One of the traits which must be considered is biological descent from persons who regard(ed) themselves as Arabs, who spoke Arabic as their native language and who were culturally and socially within the pale of Arab tradition. Certainly, given these prerequisites, the final analysis must rest on whether the individual regards this biocultural heritage as decisive: does he or she identify with Arab culture? Such identity is based on numerous factors, and primary among them are history, language, historical homeland and numerous cultural traditions.

## Regional Boundaries and Overlaps

The names by which we know the regions of the world are simultaneously convenient and misleading. Political and cultural boundaries

frequently are not coterminous; furthermore, cultural regions are seldom isolated, discrete entitites which can be treated as if entirely separated from their neighbors. We are concerned here with proverbs from those nations which together comprise the "Arab World," a designation based upon linguistic and cultural considerations and political identity. Geographically and culturally, the Arab countries belong to some -- or all -- of five geocultural regions: the Arab World, the Mediterranean, the Near East, the Middle East, and Africa (see Table 2). Each of these regions has certain identifying characteristics, one shading into the next, and the Arab countries which fall within more than one display traits of all those regions in which they are included. We cannot properly insist that the Arab World is a discrete entity cut off from its neighbors to the north, south and east, nor can we defend a view of "Arab" culture as a consistent entity within the geographical bounds of the Arab World.

How then can we discuss similarities and differences among Arab societies in a fruitful way? As J. Davis says of the Mediterranean, we must

> Make no strong claims: admit that the people who live here are of markedly different kinds -- Muslims, Christians, Jews; shepherds, farmers, factory workers and bankers; corporalists, communists, Arab socialists and parliamentary democrats. But then recognize that they have been trading and talking, conquering and converting, marrying and migrating for six or seven thousand years -- is it then unreasonable to assume that some anthropological meaning can be given to the term [Arab] World?[5]

In order to generate an abstraction which would subsume all Middle Eastern Arab societies and exclude the rest of the world, we must regard the area's unity as a consequence of intercourse between people

TABLE 2

ARAB COUNTRIES AND GEOCULTURAL REGIONS

| Mediterranean | Near East | Arab World | Middle East | Africa |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Spain | XX | XX | XX | XX |
| Malta | XX | (Malta)[1] | XX | XX |
| France | XX | XX | XX | XX |
| Italy | XX | XX | XX | XX |
| Cyprus | Cyprus | XX | XX | XX |
| Southern Yugoslavia | Southern Yugoslavia | XX | XX | XX |
| Albania | Albania | XX | XX | XX |
| Greece | Greece | XX | XX | XX |
| SYRIA[2] | SYRIA | SYRIA | SYRIA | XX |
| LEBANON | LEBANON | LEBANON | LEBANON | XX |
| PALESTINE | PALESTINE | PALESTINE | PALESTINE | XX |
| XX | JORDAN | JORDAN | JORDAN | XX |
| XX | IRAQ | IRAQ | IRAQ | XX |
| XX | SAUDI ARABIA | SAUDI ARABIA | SAUDI ARABIA | XX |
| XX | KUWAIT | KUWAIT | KUWAIT | XX |
| XX | BAHRAIN | BAHRAIN | BAHRAIN | XX |
| XX | QATAR | QATAR | QATAR | XX |
| XX | U.A.E.[3] | U.A.E. | U.A.R. | XX |
| XX | OMAN | OMAN | OMAN | XX |
| XX | P.D.R.Y. | P.D.R.Y. | P.D.R.Y. | XX |
| XX | Y.A.R. | Y.A.R. | Y.A.R. | XX |
| EGYPT | EGYPT | EGYPT | EGYPT | EGYPT |
| LIBYA | LIBYA | LIBYA | LIBYA | LIBYA |
| TUNISIA | TUNISIA | TUNISIA | TUNISIA | TUNISIA |
| ALGERIA | ALGERIA | ALGERIA | ALGERIA | ALGERIA |
| MOROCCO | MOROCCO | MOROCCO | MOROCCO | MOROCCO |
| XX | SUDAN | SUDAN | SUDAN | SUDAN |
| XX | XX | MAURETANIA | XX | MAURETANIA |
| XX | XX | SOMALIA | XX | SOMALIA |
| Turkey | Turkey | XX | Turkey | XX |
| XX | XX | XX | Iran | XX |
| XX | XX | XX | Afghanistan | XX |
| XX | XX | XX | (Pakistan)3 | XX |

[1]Maltese is sometimes considered a dialect of Arabic; however, culturally Malta is more closely aligned with Mediterranean Europe. Hence the inclusion here is on linguistic, not cultural, criteria.

[2]Capital letters indicate countries included for this study.

[3]Pakistan is included in the Middle East by some authors and excluded by others.

of diverse societies emanating from a variety of motives. Such an abstract image must include, as does Davis's image of the Mediterranean, the institutions and processes which were created to promote interaction as well as "those relics which were created by it and now appear diffused in certain zones, if not throughout the area."[6] Social factors in the Arab World have resulted from long interaction of varied peoples and must therefore be viewed historically as well as synchronically.

What institutions, processes, and "relics" combine to bring unity out of the heterogeneity of the Arab Middle East? The most obvious are the Muslim religion and the Arabic language (see below), which spread in unison from the Arabian Peninsula. Islām as the predominant religion and Arabic as the major language in Arab countries help to unify the area in spite of the centrifugal pull of nationalistic politics and cultural differences, which exemplify on a massive scale the Arabic proverb "My brother and I against my cousin; my cousin and I against a stranger." Islām was built upon the foundations of its Semitic forebears, Christianity and Judaism, and since the seventh century of this era Muslims, Jews and Christians have interacted throughout the Middle East. Similarly, Arabic was introduced quite late to some parts of the Arab World, particularly North Africa, where it absorbed certain features of indigenous languages, some of which still co-exist with Arabic. It is the combination of Arabic as the dominant vernacular and Islām as the dominant religion which have provided for the distinguishing homogeneous outloook and behavior of the area as a whole[7] in spite of variations from one region or political entity to another.[8]

## Arabs Prior to Islām

Before delving into the factors which help to identify the contemporary Arab, it is vital to have some knowledge of the original Arabs, that is, the people of the Arabian Peninsula who left their homeland in the seventh century C.E. to proliferate their name and their culture throughout much of Asia, Africa and Europe.[9]

Early Arab history and tribal genalogies were transmitted for the most part in legends, proverbs and oral poetry. It is said that the fifth-generation descendents of Shem[10] established a mass settlement in present-day Yemen. Sometime around 3500 B.C.E. a large group of Semites migrated northward along the western coast of Arabia, across the Suez Peninsula and into Egypt., where they mixed with the Hamitic[11] tribes to form the ancient Egyptians, the first people to build stone structures and to develop a solar calendar. Another Semitic migratory movement transpired around the same time as a group traveled along the eastern Arabian coast and into the Tigris-Euphrates valley. There the Semitic immigrants mixed with the ancient Sumerians to form the Babylonians, inventors of the arch and the vault, the wheeled cart, and a system of weights and measures. A thousand years later more Semites moved north from Yemen into Syria and Palestine, where intermarriage produced the Amorites and Phoenicians, who in turn parented the Carthaginians and who developed the first exclusively alphabetic system of writing.

The next 2300 years witnessed numerous migrations, conquests and empires. Judaism, the first monotheistic religion and the base upon which Christianity and Islām were built, was established in Palestine between 1500 and 1200 B.C.E. A series of regimes controlled the Arab

homeland until the sixth century B.C.E., when the Persians seized contol of what is modern Iran, parts of Pakistan, Afghanistan, Asia Minor and Greece, as well as Egypt, Libya, Palestine, Syria and Iraq. The Persians lost their hold in the fourth century B.C.E. as Alexander the Great of Macedon defeated them and established not only his empire but also a firm position in Middle Eastern folklore which persists to this day.[12]

By the second century C.E. Rome had seized all of Alexander's empire from Libya to Iraq. As Rome became Christianized, so did many of her subjects in Syria, Palestine and Egypt. Various Arab states were established, including the northern Arab city-states at Petra and Palmyra. The desert insulated much of Arabia from Roman influences, but contacts were maintained between the people of the peninsula and the rest of the world. From 750 to 250 B.C.E. the Sabaens of contemporary Yemen traded goods from the East to the Romans and taxed the caravan routes until the Romans found their prices so exhorbitant that they reopened the ancient canal through the Suez Peninsula, enabling Roman and Egyptian merchant ships to ply their trade directly with the Orient. International commerce through the Arabian Peninsula was virtually eliminated, and the south Arabian tribes reverted to their former style of life and worship, generally of the moon, it is believed, although little is known of the pre-Islāmic religious beliefs of the Arabs.

As the sixth century B.C.E. drew to a close, Arabia was torn by conflicts in Yemen between Christian, Jewish and pagan tribes, by foreign domination in some places and anarchy in others. The time was ripe for a new spiritual movement.

## The Coming of Islām

In the early years of the seventh century C.E. a religious fire was ignited in the Arabian Peninsula which burned its way across much of the Old World and continues to unite diverse peoples within its spiritual glow. The prophet of this new religion was Muḥammad, an orphan of the Quraysh tribe. He was born in Mecca in 570 C.E. and reared initially by his grandfather and later by an uncle. As a merchant who traveled with trading caravans to Syria, Muḥammad had seen something of the world outside his homeland and this undoubtedly affected much of his later thinking.

At the age of forty, the Prophet began to experience religious visions in which he was instructed to revive the faith of God's previous prophets, including Adam, Abraham and Jesus, and to preach to humankind on the oneness of God. During the subsequent years, Muḥammad continued to receive messages from God through the archangel Jibrīl (Gabriel); these messages, which Muḥammad recited, were recorded in writing and, under the orders of the third caliph, ᶜUthmān, the definitive collection, the Holy Qurān, was established. It has remained unaltered since the seventh century and has been the strongest force in unifying the Arab World and the non-Arab Muslim world as well.

The Propeht Muḥammad's influence on the Arabs and subsequently on the populations of the lands they conquered was profound. He laid the foundation for one of the world's major religions, Islām.[13] He established a code of conduct inclusive of all aspects of human life, including morality, criminal and civil laws and punishments, social organization, and economics; the Caliphate was a theocratic state based

on the Qurān. Muhammad's followers promoted the Arab-Islāmic culture, which to this day exerts significant influence on the far-flung lands of the Muslim world and beyond.

By the end of the century following the death of the Prophet, the Arab-Muslim empire extended from the Punjab area of India in the East, West to the Atlantic in Morocco, and curved back around the Mediterranean through Spain and into France where, in 732 C.E., the Muslim armies were blocked from further penetration into Europe at the Battle of Poitiers. Because the Arabs soon recognized that they were short of the necessary manpower to manage their vast empire, they began early to assimilate non-Arab populations into Arab tribal structure. Initially these people were regarded as clients but eventually they claimed genealogical descent from Arabia. Thus the loyalties and Arab identity of the contemporary peoples from Morocco through Iraq were cemented.

Not all Arabs, of course, are Muslim; notable Christian populations are found in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Palestine, Jordan, and Egypt. There are also Arabs who follow minority religions such as the Druze in Lebanon and Syria. Nevertheless, Islām has shaped the culture and history of these peoples to such an extent that it is virtually impossible to speak of Arabs without reference to their Islāmic, if not Muslim, heritage.[14]

## "Lawful Magic": The Arabic Language

One of the most powerful contributors to Arab identity, a force surpassed only by religion as a unifying factor among Arabs and Muslims, is the Arabic language. Although integrally tied to Islām, Arabic pre-

dated that religion and is the spoken medium of non-Muslim Arabs as well as the liturgical language of Arab and non-Arab Muslims. Spoken by more than 160 million people[15], Arabic is the national language of the states of North Africa, the Arabian Peninsula and the Fertile Crescent.[16] It is also the spoken language of many inhabitants of Palestine, of minority groups in Iran and some African nations, and of emigrants from Arab countries now scattered world-wide.

Anwar Chejne observes that Arabic has long been regarded by Muslims generally and Arabs in particular as a Divine gift to Mankind, "unique in beauty and majesty, and the most eloquent of all languages for expressing thought and emotions."[17] Philip Hitti has described the sentimental attitude of the Arabs toward their language thus:

> No people in the world, perhaps, manifest such enthusiastic admiration for literary expression and are so moved by the word, spoken or written, as the Arabs. Hardly any language seems capable of exercising over the minds of its users such irresistible influence as Arabic....The rhythm, the rhyme, the music produce on them the effect of what they call "lawful magic" (*sihr ḥalāl*).[18]

Linguistic appreciation among Arabs is not limited to the artistic value of poetry but extends to *fasāha* (eloquence), described by Chejne as "the ability to express oneself correctly," which, in the *Jāhilīya* as well as in Islāmic times, was held to be "one of the basic attributes of the 'perfect man,' and a mark of wisdom."[19]

The Qurān is viewed as the epitome of linguistic expression in Arabic. The book is believed to have divine origin in terms of its meaning, its wording, and its smallest details, being, as Chejne explains, an earthly "transcript of the Word of God as put forth in a

preserved tablet (*lawḥ maḥfūẓ*) containing the Mother of the Book (*umm al-kitāb*) found in the seventh century from eternity."[20] He goes on to observe that the divinity of the Qurān is in fact accorded the Arabic language itself, so that the question "of whether Arabic was God's gift, and hence superior to all languages in beauty, wealth, and nobility, has deeply concerned philologists, theologians, philosophers, religious scholars, and others."[21] Westermarck notes that the spoken word is widely believed by Arabs to have inherent power and an ability to bring about "its own realization."[22]

Religion, then, carried language to the far corners of the empire even as language carried religion. In the Islāmic era, language and religion became thoroughly intertwined so as to be inseparable; yet the homogenization of the two did not always exist, as evidenced in the classical literature of the century immediately preceding the advent of Islām. William Polk writes that this classical literature, "although the result of pagan cultures and expressing a social ethos often in conflict with Islam, is so highly prized as the linguistic treasury of Arabic as to be brought into the schools of theology."[23]

Chejne portrays the historical role of the Arabic language, which reached beyond its religious significance in Arab-Islāmic culture. Arabic served as the literary language of the vast Muslim Empire, including Spain and, for a time, Sicily. It had general appeal as a medium of intellectual expression for Muslim and non-Muslim alike, and acquired a universal character in the ninth and tenth centuries. For the pious it was a divine language; for the scholar it was clear, expressive, flexible and rich.[24]

As Arabic spread during the first century of Muslim expansion, it encountered at least three highly sophisticated languages with long intellectual traditions: Persian, Syriac and Greek. Arabic, as Jabra I. Jabra observes, "absorbed the full strength of each of those languages which were spoken by the new subjects of the conquering race, most of whom were soon converted to Islam."[25] Although Jabra's use of the term "race" is inappropriate, it is true that the languages of those people conquered by the Arabs mingled with Arabic; as Chejne notes, language became the unifying factor among diverse religious and ethnic groups: Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians, Muslims; Arabs, Syrians, Persians, Egyptians, Spaniards and others.[26] Jabra adds that Arabic replaced Coptic and Greek in Egypt, as well as a number of local languages in North Africa and Spain, not completely destroying them but becoming "the *lingua franca* of a vast, loosely-knit empire, where anyone, whatever his origin, who aspired to learning or to social or political distinction, had to perfect the language as his medium."[27] Jabra claims as well that many non-Arabs who embraced Islām believed that those who best mastered the Arabic language would be seated nearer to God in Paradise,[28] while it is also widely thought that Arabic *is* the language of Paradise.

The eighth and ninth centuries saw the peak of Arab-Islāmic culture and the low ebb for European. Between the two there were numerous points of contact, especially around the Mediterranean; because of its unquestioned supremacy, Arab culture, particularly language, exerted a profound influence on Europe. Jabra describes the role of language:

> Although it did not supplant Greek or Latin, both of which were embedded in the matrix of Europe's developing vernaculars, it supplanted

> them in most spheres of thought and scientific endeavor. Medicine, astronomy, chemistry, mathematics, philosophy, though often reaching the majority of European scholars through Latin translations, were forever marked with the stamp of the Arabic language and its modes of thinking.[29]

Beginning in the eleventh century, Arabic was the medium by which Graeco-Roman learning was transmitted to the West, as Arabic books were translated into Latin, Spanish or French; Spain and Sicily says Chejne, linked East and West "in the cultural osmosis that had an enormous influence on Western thought."[30] Many of the great philosophers and poets of the Arab empire weren't Arabs at all, but were integral to Arab history and culture. The unifying power of the Arabic language was so great, according to Jabra, that "from the very start, it had become the essence of the Arab ethos."[31]

The Qurān was in large measure responsible for the position which the Arabic language assumed, for, whatever a Muslim's language, only Arabic could be used for prayer, as God's words were spoken, through Muhammad, in Arabic; Jabra explains that, because its prose was "so beautiful and evocative, its grammar so subtle and faultless, its teaching so terse and exact, God's Noble Book became the sole foundation of a whole new culture. Content and form seemed truly inseparable."[32]

As the Islāmic expansion encompassed more diverse cultures and languages, new linguistic forms appeared. *Kalām al-muwalladīn* (speech of the non-Arab Muslims) was the term applied to a new speech style characterized by mixed foreign origin and existing to some extent alongside classical forms. Another new type of speech, deviating even more from classical Arabic, also appeared; this was dubbed *kalām al-ʿāmmah*

(speech of the common people[33], that is dialect forms). These new forms were perceived as threats to the purity of Arabic, so that philological schools were established at Kufa and Basra in Iraq for the codification of language, using the Qurān and the dialects of the Bedouin tribes as the standards of correctness.[34]

Arabic is one of the Semitic languages, which from earliest times have claimed the contiguous areas of the Arabian Peninsula, the Fertile Crescent and Ethiopia as their homelands. Three types of Arabic are normally identified, all of them being more or less related to one another. Classical Arabic (*al-ᶜarabīya al-fusha*) of pre-Islāmic and Medieval times was the mother of the other two types, and is the medium of much literature, including pre-Islāmic poetry and the Qurān. Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) developed out of classical morphology, syntax and grammar. Aside from French in the nations of North Africa, it is the major literary language throughout the Arab World.[35] MSA is the medium of a wide and varied literature, and co-exists with the many dialects. Each of the spoken Arabic dialects has unique features; there are, between some dialects, vast differences in vocabulary, pronunciation, and even grammar. There are many dialects, and often multiple dialects within a single country, yet all are linked through their relation to Classical and Modern Standard Arabic.[36]

Today the Arabic language is no less important as a symbol of Arab identity and unity than it was in the early days of the empire. As Polk remarks, language was of vital importance during the nineteenth-century reawakening of Arab consciousness, as it transcended religious and national differences:

> speakers of Arabic, Christian and Muslim alike, sought to recover the sources of their *supra*-religious culture. The speakers of Arabic found language, even more than the Islamic religion, on which they disagreed, to be the one core of their culture. The centrality of language, the fascination with the word, the concern with the medium rather than the message, has long been remarked upon as a distinctive Semitic characteristic. Language is not *an* art form, it is *the* art of the Arabs.[37]

Language, then, brought people together as Arabs in the early centuries of Arab-Islāmic expansion and underscored their common heritage during the cultural reawakening of the last century; language retains this unifying function in no lesser measure among contemporary Arabs.

## The Arab World as "Culture Nation"

In his discussion of it as a "culture continent," Raphael Patai has divided the Middle East into 23 "culture areas,"[38] thirteen of which are part of the Arab World. A culture area, in this scheme, consists of a type of spatial distribution; the Arab World, although larger and more complex than Patai's areas, fits the criteria for them, as we shall see. Let us then term it a "culture nation," as it is smaller than, contained within, and more homogeneous than the Middle East culture continent, but larger than, comprehensive of, and less homogeneous than the thirteen Arab culture areas.

One factor in establishing the existence of a culture area is the inverse relationship between social and occupational stratification and the theoretical applicability of the culture area concept.[39] Where modernity has established a firm hold, the Arab World tends to be stratified in social and occupational terms; in this it shares with the rest of the world a tendency toward international homogenization due to pro-

liferation of mass media and communication among the upper, educated and affluent classes. However, in many rural, and even lower-class village and urban areas, stratification is less significant and traditional concepts and culture remain strong, linking distant parts of the Arab World through adherence to a common cultural heritage dispersed over a thousand years ago.

Patai cites three other criteria of a culture area which are more directly related to concerns of this analysis. One criterion is the correlation between culture and geographic area of locus. Geography and culture are, in other words, intertwined. Furthermore, the center of a culture area will be well-defined but the margins will seldom be clear-cut. A culture area, finally, is assumed to be the result of historical processes, with a quantitative relationship between age and area: the larger the spatial area, the longer the historical process. Let us now examine these characteristics of a culture area as they pertain to the Arab Culture Nation.

## Geography and Culture:
## The Nomadic and Sedentary Middle East

A trip to the pyramids at Giza in Egypt gives startling clarity to one of the fundamental dichotomies of the Middle East, for there is, as if drawn with a pencil, a line between the tawny desert and the emerald farmlands. This same line, with more or less exactness, cuts through all the lands of the region, affecting and affected by the peoples living there.

Three main types of land are found in the Middle East and they are linked to predictable cultural patterns. The green, cultivated areas, primarily because they contain readily available water supplies and tillable soils, are suitable for sedentary village or urban life. Usually of a generally Mediterranean character, these lands have long, dry summers and mild, rainy winters. The natural flora here is often abundant, especially in spring and autumn, and cultivated areas can be highly fruitful. In contrast to the green sections are the arid wastelands which are unfit for human habitation. Other regions will support life if the inhabitants are equipped to move around seasonally, following the rains and pastures. For the Arabs, these latter regions are the deserts, the spawning ground of the Bedouin camel nomads.[40] Interaction between peoples of the wilderness and of more kindly lands is an integral part of Middle Eastern life; mutual influences of rural and urban sectors are pervasive.

Nomadic Arabs (*al-Badū*) and urban-dwelling Arabs (*al-hadar*) have since time immemorial needed one another, traded with one another, admired one another, and slandered one another. Each group perpetuates stereotypes of the others which are often inconsistent, containing as they do some truth, some error and much exaggeration. While the Bedouin life style is romantically viewed by urbanites as being truly Arab, such nostalgia is manifested only from beyond a certain "safe" distance. Sherri Deaver reports that "while it is proper to talk of a great grandfather who was a Bedu such relatives of closer genealogical depth are selectively ignored."[41] Furthermore, each group considers its own religious practices to be more correct than the other's, as the Bedouins

believe that city people are concerned more with the letter than with the spirit of the law, while the emotional nature of Bedouin Islām is frequently seen as a sign of fanaticism by urban dwellers.[42] Still, the life-style and ideals of the Bedouin have come to symbolize basic Arab values, which are believed, in Weekes words, to "insure harmony in human relationships, solidarity of the family in the face of adversity, and a continuation of the system...."[43] Honor comes to the family and lineage if these values are observed; shame and loss of face for the entire group result if even a single member violates the norms. Thus violations of the rules of honor are dealt with severely, by banishment or even death.[44] The parameters of the honor/shame complex are discussed in detail in later chapters; the crux of the matter, however, is the issue of collective responsibility, seen at its most powerful in nomadic tribal society but affecting Arab society at all levels.

The city dweller sees the nomad as the carrier not only of Arab ideals and virtues but of pure language as well. On the other hand, jokes and stories abound which poke fun at the crude, ignorant, dirty Bedouins; proverbs portray them as rude, dishonest, dour, parasitic, vengeful and oppressive.[45] The city is regarded as a place of prestige, remarks Gulick, in spite of the fact that the majority of urbanites are poor and weighted down with debts[46]; "The city is positively associated with 'civilization,' yet it is also unwholesome and effete, and survives only by means of new blood from rural areas, particularly the deserts."[47] Philosophers and writers criticize the supposed vices of the city dwellers, whose only positive attributes, apparently, are those somehow retained from their presumably nomadic ancestors. Nomads who move to the prestigious city are, of course, bound to be corrupted.[48]

Nevertheless, the cultural achievements of Arab-Muslim society have been urban achievements. Islām itself was born in an urban environment, although under heavy influences from desert society. The Quraysh tribe was only recently settled prior to Muhammad's birth and prophethood. Bedouin social and cultural values are at the heart of the religion: bravery, chivalry, loyalty. Furthermore, nomadic populations provided the manpower and fervor to spread the new religion, and in fewer than ten years brought under the sway of Arab-Muslim rule the lands of Arabia, Syria, Iraq, and Egypt, which were formerly Byzantine and Persian provinces. Nomadic armies soon spread the banner of Islām across central Asia as far as India, and across North Africa and into Europe.[49] At one point the Empire's armies were within one hundred miles of Paris. Despite the success of Bedouin military campaigns, however, the great advances of Islāmic culture -- in medicine, science, architecture, art, mathematics, philosophy -- occurred as Bedouin Arabs became urbanized and the people they conquered became Arabized. The Arab-Muslim community assimilated and diffused various aspects of the civilizations which it subjugated: Persian, Byzantine, European Christian. In the final analysis, then, it is the synthesis of urban, rural and nomadic Arab and non-Arab elements which composes the true character of the Arab Middle East.

## Age, Area and Boundaries

The Arab World has been in the making for some thirteen-hundred years, and although the notion of "Arab Nationalism" is a child of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, many people in what are now called Arab countries assumed Arab identity generations ago through political

and religious allegiences and real or imaginary genealogical ties to the Arabian Peninsula. One of Patai's criteria for a culture area states that the greater the homogeneity within the area and the clearer its limits, the less doubtful its culture area character; in addition, defining elements tend to be more obscure near the outer boundaries. The same may be said of a culture nation.

The Arab World is clearly an international Nation in which Arab ethnicity, Arabic language, historical ties to the Arabian Peninsula, and the Arab religion of Islām bring to bear more powerful influences than those of other groups, languages or historical ties.

If we conceieve of the Arabian Peninsula, more specifically modern-day Saudi Arabia, as the historical and cultural center of the Arab Culture Nation, we find the influences of the conquered and bordering cultures and minority populations to be more important the farther we move from the heartland. The oil wealth of this century has resulted in a massive influx of imported labor and it is possible that this, and the increased exposure of Peninsular Arabs to the outside world, will in time alter the "Arabness" of the peninsular nations,[50] but to date the area remains the most "Arab" of the Arab World.

Moving out from the center, those nations which are adjacent to Arabia are also the nearest to her in spirit: the Yemens, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait, southern Iraq, eastern Syria and Jordan. Theirs are the longest historical links and the greatest similarity to Arabia; they are influenced only moderately by other culture continents and are in fact part of the very ones in which Saudi Arabia is included: the Near and Middle East.

Another step away from Arabia proper leads into a transitional area, for here we find western Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine, all of which display characteristics not only of Arab Near and Middle Eastern culture, but of Mediterranean culture as well. Moving to the west we find the countries of North Africa occupying an even more distant and complex position geographically and culturally. Many of their historical and identifying attributes are unmistakably Arabian, brought by the invading armies over a millenium ago. But to the north lie the Mediterranean Sea and southern Europe with which, after eons of trade and travel, the North Africans share much. Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco are Mediterranean in many aspects of their cultural characters, but they also have borrowed extensively from their neighbors to the south, and sub-Saharan Africa is evident in their arts, music, dances, and folk belief systems. The Sudan similarly blends Arab and sub-Saharan elements in her traditional and political life. In spite of the vast variations, however, the many cultural and social strands which form the Arab World -- identification with the Arabic language, Arab history, and Arab-Islāmic rule -- are plaited into a braid of nations which are first and foremost Arab.

NOTES

[1]"Arabs," *Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Mankind*, Vol. I (London: Marshall Cavendish, 1978), 97.

[2]Nearly two million Arabs, of whom approximately one-third are Muslim and two-thirds Christian, live in the United States.

[3]See Jabra I. Jabra, "Arab Language and Culture," in *The Middle East: A Handbook*, ed. Michael Adams (London: Anthony Blond, 1971), 174; Richard V. Weekes, "Arabs," in *Muslim Peoples: A World Ethnographic Survey* (Westport, CO: Greenwood Press, 1978), 30.

[4]Weekes, "Arabs," 30.

[5]J. Davis, *People of the Mediterranean: An Essay in Comparative Social Anthropology* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), 12-13.

[6]*Ibid.*, 14-15.

[7]For generalized studies of the Middle East and/or the Arab World, see: Adams, *Middle East*; Morroe Berger, *The Arab World Today* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1962); John Gulick, *The Middle East: An Anthropological Perspective* (Pacific Palisades, CA: Goodyear Publishing, 1976); Rapheal Patai, *Golden River to Golden Road: Society, Culture and Change in the Middle East* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1962); Weekes, *Muslim Peoples*.

[8]Numerous ethnographic studies of specific Arab societies are available (see bibliography). For example, see: Hamed Anwar, *Growing Up in an Egyptian Village* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1934); Harold B. Barclay, *Burri al Lamaab* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1964); Elizabeth Fernea, *Guests of the Sheikh* (New York: Anchor Books, 1976); Anne Fuller, *Buarij: Portrait of a Lebanese Village* (Harvard Middle East Monographs No. 6, 1961); John Gulick, *Tripoli: A Modern Arab Town* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967); Motoko Katakura, *Bedouin Village: A Study of a Saudi Arabian People in Transition* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1977); William Lancaster, *The Rwala Bedouin Today* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Alois Musil, *The Manners and Customs of the Rwala Bedouins* (New York: The American Geographical Society, 1928).

[9]The historical outline contained here summarizes information in anthony Nutting, *The Arabs: A Narrative History from Mohammed to the Present* (New York: New American Library, 1964).

[10]Sām in Arabic. It is from Shem, son of Noah (Nūh), that the word Semite derives. This term applies not only to people, in particular contemporary Jews and sometimes Arabs, but also to languages (Arabic, Hebrew, Aramaic, Assyro-Babylonian, Phoenician, South Arabic and Ethiopic) and religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islām).

[11]From Ham (Arabic Hām), another of Noah's sons.

[12]Alexander (Arabic Iskander) is often associated with his cousin al-Khidr, and the two often assume the same roles in Arabic lore as do St. George in Christian tradition and Elijah in Jewish. The general themes and numerous parts of the Alexander legend cycle are found in the Babylonian epic of Gilgamesh, dating from 2000-1600 B.C.E. See Hasan M. El-Shamy, *Folktales of Egypt* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), Tale 43. Remnants of this epic still exist, for instance among the pearl divers of the Arabian Gulf.

[13]Islām means submission to the will of God. A Muslim is one who submits to this will be following the tenets of the Islāmic religion.

[14]A distinction is made here between the two terms as follows: *Islāmic* refers to those sociocultural values and traditions which have developed and spread with the Arab-Islāmic empire and which have influenced and been manifested by the inhabitants of areas which are now or during a particular historical period were under the administration of the Muslim Arabs. For example, Spain between the years 750 and 1492 was Islāmic, although a large proportion of its population was Christian or Jewish. *Muslim*, on the other hand, refers to persons or things directly involved with the religion of Islām.

[15]*The World Almanac and Book of Facts 1984* (New York: Newspaper Enterprise Association, 1984), 195.

[16]North Africa includes Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, northern Sudan; the Arabian Peninsula includes Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the Yemens, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, and Bahrain; the Fertile Crescent includes Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Palestine.

[17]Anwar G. Chejne, *The Arabic Language: Its Role in History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1969), 6.

[18]Philip Hitti, *A History of the Arabs from Earliest Times to the Present*, 9th ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1968), 90.

[19]Chejne, *Arabic*, 7.

[20]*Ibid.*, 8.

[21]*Ibid.*, 9.

[22]Edward A. Westermarck, "Introduction to the Proverbs of Morocco," in *Racial Proverbs: A Selection of the World's Proverbs*, ed. Selwyn Gurney Champion (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1938), lxxix.

[23]William R. Polk, "Introduction," *The Modern Arabic Literary Language: Lexical and Stylistic Developments* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), xviii.

[24]Chejne, *Arabic*, 16.

[25]Jabra, "Arabic Language," 175.

[26]Chejne, *Arabic*, 16.

[27]Jabra, "Arabic Language," 175.

[28]*Ibid.*

[29]*Ibid.*, 176.

[30]Chejne, *Arabic*, 16.

[31]Jabra, "Arabic Language," 175.

[32]*Ibid.*

[33]Abdul Hadi al-Fouadi, "Sevety-Five Sumerian Proverbs and Their Modern Iraqi Counterparts: A Comparative Study" (M.A. thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1967), 11-12; H.A.R. Gibb, "Introduction to the Proverbs of Arabia," in *Racial Proverbs: A Selection of the World's Proverbs*, ed. Selwyn Gurney Champion (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1938), xxxix.

[34]Jabra, "Arabic Language," 175.

[35]Literature in minority languages, such as Kurdish, Turkish, and Persian, is also found in some Arab countries but is limited to non-Arab ethnolinguistic minority groups.

[36]On diglossia in Arabic, see: Salih J. Altoma, *The Problem of Diglossia in Arabic: A Comparative Study of Classical and Iraqi Arabic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968); Mary Catherine Bateson, *Arabic Language Handbook* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1967).

[37]Polk, "Introduction," xviii.

[38]Patai, *Golden*, 84-114.

[39]See Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1934); Melville J. Herskovits, *Man and His Works: The Science of Cultural Anthropology* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1950).

[40]The Middle Eastern lands hospitable to nomadic peoples are divisible into three sub-types: The deserts, home to the Arab Bedouins in Arabia and North Africa, also are home to the Baluchis and Brahuis in Baluchistan and the Berber-speaking Tuareg of the Sahara, all of whom are camel nomads. Transhumance is practiced by Berbers in the Atlas Mountains; Kurds, Lurs, Bakhtiari and Qashqai in the Zagros Mountains of Iran, Turkey and Iraq; and by the Sulaymanīya of Afghanistan. Horse nomads inhabit Middle Eastern steppe lands.

[41]Sherri Deaver, "The Contemporary Saudi Woman," in *A World of Women: Anthropological Studies in the Societies of the World*, ed. Erika Bourguignon (New York: J.F. Bergin, 1980), 29.

[42]*Ibid.*

[43]Weekes, "Arabs," 33.

[44]See Chapter 5.

[45]See Appendix, proverbs 106-114.

[46]Gulick, "Village," 141.

[47]*Ibid.*, 142.

[48]*Ibid.*

[49]Berger, *Arab World*, 40.

[50]This possibility is recognized and feared by the nations of the Arabian Peninsula so that many have taken active steps to prevent or at least minimize adulteration of bloodline and culture. Kuwait, for example, offers low-interest loans to newly-weds if both are Kuwaiti. Foreigners in Kuwait may not own property and are permitted residence only so long as they, or a close relative upon whom they are dependent, are working. No tourist visas are granted; one may visit the country only if sponsored, and this privilege is affected to a large degree by the applicant's national origin. Even many ethnic Persians, born in Kuwait of parents born in Kuwait, do not have full Kuwaiti citizenship. The situation is similar in other parts of the Arabian Peninsula and Gulf.

# CHAPTER III

# PROVERBS AND PROVERB SCHOLARSHIP

## Historical Overview of Folkloristic Proverb Studies

Western paremiology has a long history influenced by a multiplicity of disciplines: linguistics and philology, literature, anthropology and, of course, folkloristics. Recent proverb studies have focused on both text and context. Collectors and analysts have tested diverse hypotheses on the basis of proverb content and social usage.

With the development of the folklore movement in the nineteenth century West, paremiology expanded by proverbial leaps and bounds. Proverbs, as Roger Abrahams indicates, were regarded as among the most conservative elements of "archaic" (rural) dialects, so that extensive text collections were made and contributed considerable amounts of material to the multitude of dialect dictionaries which appeared in the nineteenth century.[1]

Aside from the many early collections of European proverbs, numerous compendiums of "native proverbs" appeared in the nineteenth century. More often than not these collections were made not by folklorists or other trained academics but by assorted amateurs: missionaries, military personnel, political appointees, and wealthy adventurers. The quality of the collections consequently shows radical variation, and while some collectors were admirable in that they included vernacular

texts with translations[2] and, occasionally, a degree of contextual information as well,[3] others evidenced little or no scholarly rigor. Selwyn Gurney Champion's *Racial Proverbs: A Selection of the World's Proverbs*[4] is typical of the many collections which provide simply a translation, which may or may not be accompanied by an "equivalent" European proverb, and an attribution such as "Arab," ignoring the fact that such a provenience could indicate a proverb collected anywhere in the Arab World. Furthermore, the motives of collectors were not necessarily scholarship or altruism; the French collector Jacques Auguste Cherbonneau, for instance, published a collection of some ninety items from Algiers in the *Revue de géographie* in 1879. His purpose was to illustrate the mechanical and meaningless nature of African Muslim speech. He writes: *"Les musulmans de l'Afrique parlent beaucoup...sans rien dire. Nous choisissons dans nos carnets un spéciman de éléments qui composent d'ordinaire ces causeries automatiques...."*[5]

Collections of non-European proverbs found a wide audience in the West, as the massive exploration and colonization efforts of that era opened the eyes of Europeans and Americans to the astounding variations in their own species, creating a fascination with "exotic" cultures and customs. The rise of Western folklore scholarship was itself not unrelated to the expansionism of Western nations; incipient nationalism gave rise to the urgent desire to specify and preserve "national" traditions and thereby bolster "national" identity.[6] Proverb collections were often regarded as windows on the "national spirit" of an entire people, although certain writers did warn against sweeping judgements based on proverb collections. Edward Westermarck, for one,

wrote:

> As an instance of the danger the student of a people's proverbs runs if he takes them as indicative of its character without possessing adequate knowledge of facts that the proverbs fail to disclose, I may mention the sayings dealing with married women. Among all our [Moroccan] proverbs there is not one that expresses any tender feelings in a husband towards his wife; yet it would be a mistake to assume that no such feelings exist....we have here to take into account the Moorish idea of decency: it is considered indecent of a man to *show* any affection for his wife [publicly], and it would consequently be improper to speak of it in proverbs.[7]

## The Search for Origins

Much of the proverb literature of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries was focused on historical issues. The pervasive search for origins which dominated folkloristics in its formative years left paremiology as no exception; as Alan Dundes points out, scholars sought cognate proverbs among people with related languages and posited possible birthdates and places for individual proverbs.[8] But this so-called "genetic approach" is replete with problems; Beatrice Silverman-Weinreich summarizes the difficulties thus: "Precisely because proverbs are so short -- as short as a motif in folk-tale analysis -- it is perforce difficult to uncover their history."[9] Origins are usually obscure, because paths of dissemenation, particularly of short items, are extremely complex, diffuse, and difficult to establish.

Studies of Arabic proverbs illustrate the difficulties and confusion of attempting to pinpoint origins of items, as various Arab and Western scholars have tried to do just that. H.A.R. Gibb,

for instance, sets the stage by suggesting that the Arabic proverb corpus may be regarded as a stratified syncretic body of lore, incorporating items which entered Arabic tradition in a variety of ways and time periods. The oldest level of proverbial expressions, which, he suggests,

> comprises the most typically Arab proverbs, naturally reflects the social considerations of desert life, and the aloofness, pride and stoical endurance of the nomad. But it includes also a great many sayings which share the common characteristics of proverbial philosophy elsewhere, with its emphasis on self-reliance, prudence and the pagan virtues, and its skeptical attitude towards the world and the motives of one's fellowmen.[10]

These, he says, are the proverbs of pre-Islāmic nascence which survived the coming of the new religion and sociological re-organization.

Brockelman also attempts to trace Arabic proverbs to their origins and, conversely, cites the proverbs as a source of historical information. He points out that al-Mufaddal Ibn Salāmah and al-Maydānī (see below) "give the most notable battles of the Arabs in their lists of proverbs and proverbial allusions," such as the famous inter-tribal war between the Bakr and the Taghlīb.[11] Anis Frayha discusses sources of Arabic proverbs, noting that "Al-Maydānī tells us that most of the classical Arabic proverbs were occasioned by some historical incident. But by the time he was recording them, those incidents had become mythical and legendary."[12] Thus al-Maydānī and Frayha have confused the issue even further, for not only do they speculate without proof on the origins of proverbs, they also assume that what they refer to as myths and legends are also based on historical fact, an assumption which carries its own set of problems.

In specific reference to Lebanese proverbs, Frayha adds to the list of possible sources. Many, he asserts, are based on fables and anecdotes, riddles and the answers to riddles, and classical proverbs; he gives a number of examples for the first two categories but none for the last.

Islām gave Arabic proverbial expression a transfusion of new ideas, many of which ran counter to notions of the *Jāhilīya*, according to Gibb. Teachings of the Prophet and his followers and successors brought a "stratum of ethical precepts" into the lore; some of the new proverbs were literal translations of scriptural sayings of the Old and New Testaments.[13] While Gibb fails to support his assertion with examples, Frayha cites Biblical, Qurānic and Ḥadīthic proverbs in the Lebanese dialect. "Do not drink from a well and then throw a stone into it," he says, is Talmudic, while "(Just as a jar remains a jar though) you may make it stand on its mouth, so does a daughter grow to be like her mother" and "An eye cannot oppose an awl" are alterations of Ezekiel 16:44 and Acts 9:5 respectively.[14] Brockelman adds that al-Maydānī includes a proverb in his collection (see below) which appears to be a quotation from Deut. 32-15, and notes that "New Testament sayings are common among Arabic proverbs, notably from the Sermon on the Mount."[15] Christian legends such as those about the martyrdom of Jurjīs and the story of the Seven Sleepers are also echoed in Arabic proverbs.[16]

As far as Islāmic sources, "Muḥammad died but his people were not at a loss," writes Frayha, is attributed to the first Caliph, Abū Bakr, announcing the death of the Prophet. "Do not dislike anything, for it may be of good use to you" derives from Sūra 2 of the Qurān,

verse 213.[17] Many other proverbial sayings were attributed to the Prophet and his Companions; Ibn Khallād al-Ramhurmūzī and Abū Hilāl al-ᶜAskarī made a collection of *Amthāl an-Nabī* (*Proverbs of the Prophet*) which circulated outside the canonical collections of *Hadīths* (see below). Al-Maydānī includes a chapter in his *Book of Collected Proverbs* on sayings attributed to the Prophet and the first Caliphs.[18] Pre-Islāmic poets such as Tarafa, Imru'alqais and Labīd are also seen as sources of proverbs.

The Arab-Islāmic expansion had additional profound effects on the Arabic language and proverbs. The conquests of the homelands of other ancient cultures in Egypt, Syria, Mesopotamia and Persia, and the subsequent mingling of Arabs with the peoples of these lands, mutually affected their languages, literatures, and, it is likely, their proverbs. Gibb points out that, as in the confrontation of *Jāhilīyan* and Islāmic traditions, two conflicting elements were at work in the conquered lands: popular expressions of ancient origin overlaid with a recent veneer of Christian or Zoroastrian philosophy.[19] Thus, as Arab-Islāmic influence increased, four divergent streams of tradition combined: the ancient indigenous proverbs and more recent expressions current in the colonized lands, and the imported pre-Islāmic and Islāmic proverbs of the newcomers, the conquerers. Still later another stratum was added, says Gibb, as sayings of later genesis and verse fragments from such post-*Hijra* poets as al-Mutanabbī, al-Farazdaq and Mutīᶜ b. Iyās, "who either coined new phrases and similes or clothed the old in new and more expressive forms,"[20] were superimposed on the other four strata. In fact, Ismāᶜīl al-Tālaqanī collected those verses of al-

Mutanabbī which have passed into oral tradition in a work called *The Remaining Proverbs from the Poetry of al-Mutanabbī (al-Amthāl al-sā'ira min Shir$^{c}$r al-Mutanabbī)*.[21]

The major flaw in all these attributions is that the use of an expression by a famous personnage, whether Prophet or poet, or in such works as the Bible or the Talmud, does not necessarily indicate coinage by that person or in that writing. Arab poets, including the Prophet, were members of a community which valued oral tradition, and the rules of Arabic poetic and rhetorical composition did not disapprove of formulaic expression or "borrowing" from prior authors or traditions.[22]

## The Study of Arabic Proverbs

Compilation of Arabic proverb lore began toward the start of the Islāmic era, or perhaps even prior to that time. C. Brockelman observes that "Proverbs excited the interest of the learned from the very beginning of Arabic literature; historians and philologists emulated one another in collecting and explaining them."[23] During the early period of Islāmic expansionism, as the rapidly growing empire subsumed many areas and peoples of the East, an active school of Arab philologists sought to preserve the verbal heritage and protect the language from non-Arabic influences (see p. 37) by recording what they could of ancient usage, including proverbs and related forms of expression. In fact, almost all the notable philologists devoted special works to proverbs.[24] The result was an extensive literature on Classical Arabic proverbs, probably running to hundreds of volumes and containing much vital information on pre-Islāmic Arab culture as well as proverb texts.[25]

The oldest extant philological treatise on Arabic proverbs is the eighth century *Kitāb al-Amthāl* (*Book of Proverbs*) of Mufaḍḍal Ibn Salāmah al-Ḍabbī. Ibn Salāmah, who died sometime in the second century of the *Hijra*, was a Kūfan philologist and an authority on pre-Islāmic poetry. His work on proverbs, one of the best known collections of Classical Arabic proverbs, was among his many works on a variety of subjects.[26]

Abū ᶜUbayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām al-Harawī, a philologist, jurist and theologian born in Herat in 770 C.E., continued the work of Ibn Salāmah. Al-Harawī's book, the *Kitāb al-Amthāl* (*Book of Proverbs*), also called *al-Majalla* (*The Review*), was printed in Constantinople as part one of *at-Tuḥfa al-Bahīya*.[27]

Ḥamza al-Iṣfahanī's 10th century collection survives in manuscript form. This collection deals with proverbs in the *afaᶜlu min* verbal form and was used extensively by later writers; it was, for example, "copied word for word by al-Maidānī for the corresponding section of his book."[28]

Building upon the works of Ibn Salāmah and al-Harawī was another philologist, Abū Hilāl al-ᶜAskarī, who died around 1005 C.E. Al-ᶜAskarī's *Jamharat al-Amthāl* (*Collection of Proverbs*), printed posthumously in Bombay in 1306-07, dealt more comprehensively with the Classical proverbs than did the collections of his predecessors[29]; it was the first attempt to annotate each proverb from the philological and historical point of view, excluding all post-Classical material, to which al-Iṣfahānī had allotted considerable space.[30]

The best known and most comprehensive of the early Arabic proverb studies is the *Kitāb Majmaᶜ al-Amthāl* (*Book of Collected Proverbs*) of Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Maydānī, another philologist. Al-Maydānī, who died October 27, 1124, gathered together material collected by his forerunners and "expanded each section by an appendix on modern proverbs."[31] Al-Maydānī's *Kitāb* still extant in several manuscripts and regarded as a standard work on Arabic proverbs, appeared in two volumes, and offers material on "ancient Arabic household words and proverbs, with very important explanatory notes on poetry."[32]

Despite the increasing vitality of the *ᶜammīya* (dialect) forms of speech beginning in the sixth century (see pp. 35-38), it was not until the nineteenth and present centuries that, under the influence of European scholarship, Arab scholars began to display an interest once more in proverbs[33] and to make serious attempts to collect them "from the living speech of the people."[34] Interest shifted from philological concerns with preserving "pure" Arabic to a linguistic focus on spoken language; most works on modern dialects by Arab writers include sections on proverbs.[35] Among the best known works by Arabs are *al-Durra al-yatīma fi 'l-Amthāl al-Qadīma* by Ibrahīm Sarkīs Lubnānī,[36] Maḥmūd Ef. ᶜOmar al-Bājūrī's *Kitāb Amthāl al-mutakallimīn min ᶜAwāmm al-Miṣrīyīn*[37] and *Ashhar al-Amthāl* by Ṭāhir b. Ṣalih al-Jazā'irī.[38] Aḥmad Taymūr's *al-Amthāl al-ᶜAmmīya* (*Collquial Proverbs*)[39] contains 3200 spoken Egyptian proverbs, and Sheikh Jalāl al-Hanafī's *al-Amthāl al-Baghdādīya* (*The Proverbs of Baghdad*)[40] is a multi-volume collection of Iraqi colloquial proverbs.

## Recent Trends

In part because of the growing influence of the social sciences on paremiology, there has been a trend away from purely literary and historical studies among Western researchers in the latter part of the twentieth century.[41] Scholars still do content analyses, attempting in part, according to Dundes, "to correlate proverb content with national character and to extrapolate worldview from proverbs,"[42] but folklorists and anthropologists involved in such studies usually caution their readers about the limitations of such studies,[43] and utilize more rigorous analytical tools than the simple subjective commentary of their predecessors.

Since the 1960's contextual approaches have been made to all genres of folklore, and proverbs are certainly no exception. Dundes remarks that "it has been suggested that there may be laws or rather principles governing the decision-making process which results in the citation of one proverb rather than another, or rather than no proverb."[44] Folklorists have made contextual studies of proverbs in search of these elusive rules,[45] drawing on the "ethnography of speaking" movement, whose approach to oral literature is, in the words of Dell Hymes, the movement's founder, "concerned with the situations and uses, the patterns and functions, of speaking as an activity in its own right."[46] Some examples of this ethnographic approach are a study by E. Ojo Arewa and Alan Dundes of Yoruba proverbs and their use in context,[47] Peter Seitel's work on proverbs as metaphors,[48] Robert A. Barakat's study of Arabic proverbs in context,[49] and Kwesi Yankah's analyses of Akan proverbs.[50]

Proverbs have also found their way into the realm of applied folklore, particularly in clinical psychology. Dundes, for instance, reports that proverbs have been used to measure certain mental skills[51]; Franzeska Baumgarten has written on the usefulness of proverbs in attitude measurement.[52] Paul Satz and L.T. Carroll indicate that abnormal mental conditions can be determined through the use of proverbs as projective language behavior,[53] and Wolfgang Mieder reports that proverbs can be useful in testing intelligence, verbal comprehension, abstract thinking, schizophrenia and personality traits.[54]

Western scholars have, then, approached their materials from numerous theoretical and philosophical angles and with a variety of purposes. There have been writers who studied proverbs in their own languages; others have focused on proverbs from outside their own traditions. Some scholars, particularly folklorists, have carried out comparative research in quest of universal principles of proverbs definition and usage. Psychologists have regarded proverbs as manipulative tools in the assessment of personality. We move now to some of the specific issues addressed in proverb research.

## The Problem of Definition

Despite the near universality of proverbs and the long history of paremiology, scholars have yet to concur on a clear, complete, and universally applicable definition of the proverb. Some paremiologists have elected to minimize or completely ignore the fundamental issue of defining their materials; no less a notable than Archer Taylor wrote that "The definition of the proverb is too difficult to repay the under-

taking," and that "Except in a vague paraphrase there is no defining a proverb."[55] B.J. Whiting, a leading literary scholar, concurred: "To offer a brief yet workable definiton of the proverb, especially with the proverbial phrase included, is well nigh impossible."[56] Whiting did in fact suggest the following definition twenty years earlier, in 1932:

> A proverb is an expression which, owing its birth to the people, testifies to its origin in form and phrase. It expresses what is apparently a fundamental truth, -- that is, a truism, -- in homely language, often adorned, however, with alliteration and rhyme. It is usually short, but need not be; it is usually true, but need not be. Some proverbs have both a literal and also a figurative meaning, either of which makes perfect sense; but more often they have but one of the two. A proverb must be venerable; it bears signs of antiquity, and, since such signs may be counterfeited by a clever literary man, it should be attested in different places at different times.[57]

Whiting then laments that many "true proverbs" do not fit all the requirements of even his loop-hole-ridden definition and that no one definition can cover all three groups of proverbial literature -- "true proverbs, proverbial phrase, and sententious remarks,"[58] which doubtless accounts for his later despair.

Friedrich Seiler, in his great work on German proverbs, gives examples of functional criteria and stylistic devices characteristic of proverbs but, criticizes Silverman-Weinreich, "he ends by drowning in a sea of definienda and cannot arrive at an internally consistent definition to cover every proverb."[59] Danish philologist Iver Kjaer defines proverbs as "anonymous traditional sayings about human life (directly or metaphorically)..." but says nothing about form or length, and leaves out many proverbs concerned with non-human phenomena such as weather.[60] Roger Abrahams begged the question when he wrote in

1967 that "proverbs are difficult to define by internal characteristics, but they are immediately recognizable when used in a proverb context."[61] Yet how do we recognize a "proverb context" if we do not know what a proverb is?

Barakat makes a lengthy and thoroughly confusing stab at defining the Arabic proverb (*mathal*) in contrast to the "maxim" (*qāʿida*).[62] He bases his distinction on data from informants, who he concedes are far from agreement on the details of differentiating the two forms, and he concludes that in fact the two terms are used interchangeably.[63] Most informants, he says, agreed that both forms may contain *hikma* (wisdom; see below) but usage context determines the amount of *hikma* in an item; a few informants said that all proverbs do not necessarily contain *hikma*.[64] The *mathal*, reports Barakat, is said to express "higher truth" than the *qāʿida*, and to convey cultural information (norms) relevant to Arabic society and culture.[65] Does this then imply that information or norms conveyed by the *qāʿida* are irrelevant to Arab culture? One assumes that Barakat means here that the *mathal* is more specific to Arab culture than the *qāʿida*, since some degree of relevance must exist for the *qāʿida* to be used at all. Stated another way, it appears that Barakat means to say that the *qāʿida* pertains to both Arab culture and humankind in general while the *mathal* is culture specific. But how such determinations are made or how the "height" of a truth is measured are not dealt with and would seem in any case to be highly dubious and subjective distinctions.

Barakat then relates that some informants distinguish between the two forms on the basis of applications; the *mathal* is said to apply

to personal situations involving friends, relatives, neighbors, etc., while the *qāᶜida* is applicable to general situations -- political, organizational, and some social situations.[66] This then seems to suggest that an item's identity may alternate depending on the usage context. Ultimately Barakat admits that the fine line which distinguishes *mathal* from *qāᶜida* is exceedingly difficult to draw, and that in fact it is often contextually defined.[67] Summarized, the characteristics posited by some informants for the *mathal* include a personal level of situational orientation, possession of a certain degree of *hikma* (wisdom), potential application "to those contexts which are of greater value to human behavior and expressive of traditional norms in Arabic society," and the stating of "some general, or universal, truth significant in terms of that society and its members."[68] The *qāᶜida*, on the other hand, is also situation-oriented but it is applied to contexts which appear to be impersonal, general and universal. The *qāᶜida* may contain *hikma* but it is "more expressive of universal norms on a universal level than on a specific cultural or societal level,"[69] whatever that means. Barakat, then, drowns in the same sea of defining details as did Seiler, and further complicates the matter by implying that definition must rely on the subjective attribution of *hikma* (wisdom) to contextual applications of items.

Nigel Barley asserts that even where definitions of proverbs have been proferred, they have often been "enlighteningly wrong."[70] Careful examination of proposed partial or full definitions does, however, reveal a number of seemingly minimal aspects of the proverb which will lead to a complete and adequate definition. These criteria

fall into five categories: form, source of authority, mode of expression, *raison d'être*, and content.

## Form

Most proposed proverb definitions commence with some statement on the special form[71] of the proverb, which has been described as a brief,[72] terse, economical,[73] pithy,[74] witty, full, impersonal and linguistically artful[75] eipgrammatical[76] "standard statement of moral or categorical imperatives in fixed metaphorical paradigmatic form" dealing with "fundamental logical relationships."[77] A "standard statement," according to Barley, implies one which is "reducible to a list for any given culture,"[78] and folklorists have, naturally, emphasized that the proverb should be "current in tradition."[79] The conciseness of the proverb is evident in the fact that most proverbs consist of a single sentence; they are, in essence, "among the shortest forms of traditional expression that call attention to themselves as formal artistic entitites."[80] The uniqueness of proverb form has been described by Seitel as "out-of-context" because a proverb violates the conventional rules of conversation in some way, so that while a proverb may be appropriate within a particular conversational context, its "syntax, subject matter, or other features violate in some (acceptable) way the 'usual' context."[81]

Form in Arabic proverbs is discussed by Mahgoub[82] and, in more detail, by Westermarck.[83] Mahgoub elaborates various stress patterns and syllabic structures common in Egyptian proverbs, and notes that

many proverbs display a balanced structure consisting of two phrases. In addition, she cites the wide use of particles such as *'illi* (which), *zayy* (as, like), *ya* (O!), *mīn* (who) and *'in* (if) as formal markers of proverbs. In reference to Moroccan proverbs, Westermarck enumerates eleven major formal categories and sub-categories as follows: 1) comparison ("An old woman is worse than the devil"); 2) comparison and antithesis ("Your friend who is near is better than your brother who is far away"); 3) causation ("Patience is the key of all well-being"); 3a) consequences in logically related phrases ("What has passed has died, it will be repeated no more"); 3b) causation in literal plus metaphorical phrases ("An enemy will not become a friend, and bran will not become flour"); 4) imperative ("Do as your neighbor does or move from him"); 4a) imperative preceeded by conditional clause ("If you are a peg endure the knocking and if you are a mallet strike"); 4b) negative imperative ("Don't belittle him who is not small, don't magnify him who is not great"); 4c) two antithetical imperatives ("Sow wheat, don't sow thorns"); 5) curses ("The curse of God be on the golden cup, if there is bile in it"); 6) blessings ("May God be with you, O stranger"); 7) curse and blessing ("May God betray the betrayer, and may God increase the good of him who is good"); 8) question with negative implication ("What is death going to take from an empty house?"); 9) sarcasm ("O how beautiful is the love in the head of other people"); 10) irony ("I shall have to wait till the raven becomes white and the donkey climbs a ladder and the salt blossoms"); 11) repetition: 11a) immediate repetition (Your tale [is] a tale, and your talk your talk"); 11b) repetition separated by one or more words

("There is no beauty but the beauty of action"); 11c) repetition from one phrase to the next ("Cupidity is a plague, and the plague kills"); 11d) same word starts both phrases ("A little for God and a little for my own heart"); 11e) same word ends both phrases ("The cat uses cunning, and the mouse uses cunning").

In the final analysis it may be the form which defines the proverb; as Westermarck put it some fifty years ago:

> The proverb contains some touch of fancy in the phrasing, it personifies inanimate objects or abstract conceptions, it is paradoxical, hyperbolic, pointed and pungent, pithy and epigrammatical, or it makes use of antithesis or parallelism or of rhythm, rime [sic], alliteration, or puns. It is the form which gives most proverbs their salt.[84]

Silverman-Weinreich points to the fact that form helps define the proverb not only in an academic sense, but for its users and audience as well;

> To set it apart from ordinary utterances, the proverb as an indicator of the rule, appears to be cast into certain molds, and to be characterized by certain formal markers. These markers serve as a kind of oral question marks, making the proverb easier to remember and transmit for those who know it, while intimating to those who do not know it that it *is* a proverb, when heard for the first time.[85]

Form, finally, may help lend the proverb authority, "signifying to the listener that it is no ordinary small-talk, but the Voice of traditional wisdom."[86]

## Source of Authority

If people of a particular culture do subscribe to belief in inherent truth in their proverbs -- and evidence of proverb use in serious

circumstances such as education and judicial proceedings indicates that they do -- then it follows that there should be an authority upon which that truth is founded. The shared experiences of numbers of people over time spawned what Lord Russell termed "the wisdom of many" summarized by "the wit of one"[87] in proverb form and then retransmitted by and to the ever-increasing "many." Traditional recognition of the validity of proverbial opinion is the supreme authority quoted when the oft-used formulaic lead-in to a proverb appears in English: "You know what they say...." Arabic speakers sometimes introduce proverbs through similar conventions; Mahgoub observes that Eyptian proverbs may be preceeded by *qāl* (it is said), *sahīh* (truly), *sahīh illi qāl* (he is right who said), *mish biy'ullah* (doesn't it say), or *ᶜala ra'y il-masal* (as the proverb goes); they may also be followed by *zayy-i ma biy'ūlu* or *ᶜala ra'y-i ma biy'ūlu* (as they say).[88] The "authorities" cited in these cases carry the weight of long-standing public concensus aided by the reassuring familiarity of traditional proverbs. As Raymond Firth explains it,

> It is this weight of respect for traditional teaching which is the ultimate basis and sanction for the proverb, which provides its potency as a means of enforcement of social conduct. This acts through an appeal to public opinion, for which the individual always had great regard.[89]

In tradition lies truth, or as "they" say in Lebanon, "A proverb never tells a lie."

John F. McKenna has proposed a view of this "weight of tradition" as a sort of balast preserving the equilibrium by which society counterbalances the forces of change:

> thus approved by each generation, the proverb appears identified with tradition, with the "establishment," not considered as a passing regime, but as the way a people looks at things over a period of centuries. Individual eccentricities are subordinated; the subjective gives way to the objective, in a realistic, pragmatic system given to fixing blame and to teaching lessons useful in the future. The proverb expresses the values of the winners, the survivors, not the losers, and is more frequently interested in prudence than in compassion. It is an unduly conspirational view to speak of the proverb as part of an establishmentarian plot, but it does tend to support the *status quo*, playing one of the roles of a sort of mythology.[90] Thus the proverb is the encapsulated expression of a successful ancestral tradition, that enjoys cultural stability.[91]

The proverb may function, then, as a link "between an actual experience or situation and the body of traditional wisdom."[92]

## Mode of Expression

Once a "truth" is established and the need for citing it arises, it must find a vehicle for expression. Language is that vehicle, and proverbs constitute a very special kind of language. While some proverbs are simple, straightforward statements ("Shame on him who does shameful things"), the vast majority are metaphorical. When someone says "The net scolds the sieve"[EW1467] in reference to a critic who is no better than his target, logical connections are established at several levels. First, the listener must recognize the applicability of the proverb to the situation at hand, setting up an intellectual equasion: "The net scolding the sieve" equals "person A criticizing person B." But nets and sieves are not persons, so the cognitive link must be established between the metaphorical proverb terminology and the elements of the immediate context:

the net : person A : : the sieve : person B.

If the net is in fact to person A as the sieve is to person B, then what the proverbial net does to the sieve (scolds, or evaluates negatively) is equivalent to what person A does to person B (criticizes, or evaluates negatively). Furthermore, the implication is that because the net is just as permeable as the sieve and therefore hardly in a position to criticize, person A has no business criticizing person B. G.B. Milner's view of the proverb as a statement in which symmetry of content is reproduced in symmetry of form[93] is especially applicable to such metaphorical proverbs as this one.

Metaphor is but one possible expressive mode in proverbs. A.J. Greimas discusses connotative expression in proverbs which, he says, function at two levels of signification: the referential or denotative, and the connotative.[94] The relationship between the two levels, elaborates Pierre Crepeau, is mediate, "that is to say, it is established by the aid of the sociocultural context and of the enunciative process. The enunciative process includes the situational context and the intentional or functional aspect of the proverb."[95] Variables of sociocultural and immediate context and performance help determine what is expressed and how it is expressed. Thus when studying similar but not identical proverbs we may say that "A variant is a change in form at the pure linguistic level; a version on the contrary implies a switch in semantics."[96] This distinction may well be applicable to other folkloric genres as well.

*Raison d'être*

With such complex features making up the proverbial mode of expression, why do people use proverbs at all? What is the *raison d'être* of these short traditional statements and metaphors? Certainly one factor influencing their use is the weight of traditional authority which proverbs carry and which lends credibility to what is essentially an opinionated statement on a situation; Westermarck suggests that

> When a person has something to say, a proverb often gives him a convenient ready-made means of expression which spares him the trouble of finding words of his own for formulating his thought. The use of a proverb adds piquancy to one's speech; it shows *savoir vivre* and knowledge too; it makes a neat argument which has the authority of custom and tradition -- as Aristotle said, "proverbs are in the nature of evidence."[97]

Furthermore, as Taylor notes, a proverb concisely passes judgment on a circumstance and/or suggests a course of action[98] from a particular point of view, presenting, in Abrahams' performance-centered terms, "a strategy that is self-sufficient, needing nothing more than an event of communication to bring it into play...."[99] As a rhetorical tool a proverb also takes the burden off the individuals involved in a situation calling for opinions and recommendations; by impersonalizing the situation with a proverb it becomes less unique, and the idea that other people have experienced similar difficulties often makes the outcome more acceptible. Conversely, impersonalization through proverb use in place of normal speech allows direct verbal assaults to be launched obliquely; one may couch opinions in traditional terms with relative immunity, whereas direct statements might escalate tensions. Finnegan

writes that proverbs

> may be a particularly suitable form of communication in situations and relationships of potential or latent conflict. This aspect may perhaps serve to throw more light on the fact that whereas some people make great use of proverbs, among others, for instance the Nuer, they seem to be of little or no importance. For it may be that is is precisely those societies in which there is marked latent conflict, or in which there is particular need to regulate formalized conflicts, that proverbs play an especially large part.[100]

Heda Jason has suggested that when a society fails to fulfill its own value system, oral literature functions as a "connective element" between the ideal and the real.[101] By addressing a problem of an individual, a sector of society or society as a whole, a single item (tale, song, proverb) proposes conflict resolutions, usually in metaphorical form; "Each genre of oral literature deals with a certain kind of problems, considers them from a certain point of view, offers a certain kind of resolutions."[102] In this manner proverbs, along with other traditional verbal and non-verbal expressive forms, appear "to be used to oil the wheels of the social machine...,"[103] by resolving what Seitel describes as contradictions between an individual's expectations and his or her immediate perceptions of social context.[104]

The proverbial vehicle of expression is convenient, although some analysts have, perhaps, overestimated its clarity to some extent. Jason, for one, writes that "all the connotations of a traditional expression are well known to the audience and the risk of being misunderstood, is reduced."[105] Reduced, perhaps, but hardly eliminated, as exemplified by an experiment reported by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, in which a class of 80 American students proposed three meanings for

the well-known English-language proverb, "A rolling stone gathers no moss."[106] Even when all and only the same connotations of a particular item are known to both performer and audience, it may not be clear to the listener precisely *which* interpretation is intended by the proverb user.

Recourse to traditional modes of expression can be reassuring; they provide "templates" or "portable paradigms,"[107] as Barley calls them, for the handling of immediate experience, and

> ensure that there is no such thing as a totally new situation by the establishing of relations between events and categories. They can also be regarded as mechanisms by which the mind builds up larger-scale "bits," a switch from building with bricks to building with prefabricated units.[108]

George Herzog and Charles G. Bloah describe the intellectual operation of proverbs as "[subsuming] the particular under the general,"[109] lending notes of familiarity and organization to what otherwise may appear to be an unmanageable situation. They pour verbal oil on the waters of social chaos, helping to reduce animosity and anxiety alike; proverbs, explains McKenna,

> warn people of what they fear: their own weaknesses and vices, the weaknesses, malice and machinations of others individually or collectively, the forces of nature and the force of destiny. For once warned, we feel, one can be to some extent prepared for the onslaught of these threats, or sometimes one can even control or limit their effects. Thus the wisdom of the proverb can give a double comfort against fear: first, as a rational attempt to provide a sort of handle on experience, it can give the feeling of at least understanding the danger, and second, as part of a cultural heritage shared with ancestors and posterity, it gives the feeling of a companionship in adversity, of mutual support. In a way, the proverb shares with the incantation the pretension of being a verbal formula intended to ward off evil, the incantation without a visible logical connection with the evil itself, the proverb with a more apparent

connection if, by influencing conduct, it makes survival more likely.[110]

Taken together, the skills needed to cope with the non-ideal in life -- disappointment, confrontation, fear and tragedy -- are in large measure culturally determined. Proverbs and other forms of verbal art aid in the enculturation of the individual as a competent member of society, someone who, as McKenna remarks, knows "the technical and social conventions and skills useful for survival."[111] The proverb, which is a verbal formulation of these skills and conventions, affects the thinking and behavior of the people who learn and use it, "playing in rural or pre-scientific societies much the same role as does the scientific, literary, philosophical or political dictum in our own."[112] J. David Sapir and J. Christopher Crocker regard proverbs and other traditional speech forms as manipulative tools. Through language, they say, people are able to "control -- or if not control, at least cajole" the social, the natural and the supernatural environment."[113]

## Content

The subject matter of proverbs is virtually unbounded. Cervantes's famous definition describes the proverb as being drawn from long experience and containing a truth.[114] This "truth" is usually generalized; proverbs which are applied in highly personal immediate contexts utilize very generalized, impersonal tones and can thus be used didactically without the speaker assuming the preacher's mien. "Truth" in proverbs, based as it is upon culturally and immediately specific experience and context, varies across space and time, so that the content

and message of proverbs from even a single informant are highly variable. It is because of this variability that contextual and rhetorical as well as literary and content studies are vital to a full appreciation and understanding of proverbs, as is a firm grounding in the ethnological background of the group under scrutiny; as Finnegan remarks, "It is often impossible to grasp the point or attraction of a given proverb without some knowledge of the cultural background and of what the thing mentioned means to those who utter it."[115]

Ultimately everything with which a group is concerned is fair game for proverbial comment, "the extent to which any single sphere is stressed [depending]," explains Finnegan, "on the culture and experience of a particular society."[116] Because of the potential of proverbs to comment on other cultural phenomena, paremiology has been recognized as an important area of inquiry by semioticians as well as folklorists, as it "links up with linguistics and anthropology in a fuller realization of its own importance for the understanding of human thought."[117]

## Traditional Arabic Speech Forms

Arabic verbal tradition includes a number of similar but not coterminous forms of expression; of special concern here are the terms *hadīth, hikma* and *mathal*. *Hadīth* (Tradition)[118] is the term used to indicate a special Islāmic category of expression similar to proverbs in content, form and function. A *hadīth* is, as J. Robson describes it, "an account of what the Prophet Muhammad said or did, or of his tacit approval of something said or done in his presence."[119] Unlike the Qurān, *hadīths* are not believed to be the eternal word of God but, as

they are attributed to the Prophet and represent divine guidance, their authority is exceeded only by that of the Holy Book itself. Books of *hadīths* were compiled in the early centuries of Islām, and collectors required that the traditions, to qualify as *hadīths* rather than some other traditional form of verbal expression, display two features: evidence of authenticity and the text itself. The *silsila* (chain of witnesses) from the originator to the final transmittor identifies each step in the transmission of an item from the Prophet to the compilor and provides the *sanad* (support) or *isnād* (supporting) for the authenticity of the *hadīth*.

Although the *hadīths* are maintained and transmitted by formal mechanisms, Barakat contends that they share many elements with orally transmitted proverbs. He writes:

> the basic reasoning behind the use of *hadīth* in Moslem Arab society is not dissimilar to the application of proverbs. Similarly, the *sanad* of *Hadīth*, with the stress on a chain of reliable attestors back to the originator further adds a ring of authenticity to the Traditions which, therefore, carry great wisdom and truth because they are links with the past. Proverbs, when used in conversational situations, also bear great weight because the speaker is linking his sayings to the past. By doing so, he shifts the responsibility of his content to past traditions and authorities whose wisdom cannot be questioned. To be a successful conversationalist in the Arab world, and to be respected as a user of proverbs, such "documentation" or *sanad* is required by one's audience.[121]

Barakat's argument is essentially functionalist; he sees both proverbs and *hadīths* as devices which support the speaker's point of view while shifting responsibility to the ancestors, as it were. Be that as it may, Barakat misses the most fundamental distinction between the two forms, and that is their contrasting statuses as secular and sacred items. Proverbs carry the authority of tradition, a potent but profane

power. *Hadīths*, on the contrary, glean their potency from their sacred status; only the Qurān surpasses them as embodiments of religious authority. Of course, the possibility that a particular saying that was current in tradition may have been used by the Prophet and quoted as his own expression cannot be ruled out, but the religiosity attached to the saying by his use nevertheless altered its status from secular to sacred and shifted its transmission, as a *hadīth*, from informal to formal mechanisms. Furthermore, there are items which exist simultaneously as proverbs in oral tradition and as *hadīths* in religious tradition.

Barakat also mentions *hikma* as an attribute distinguishing *hadīths* from proverbs. *Hikma* is a term with multiple meanings, the basic one being "wisdom," which, according to Goichas, "includes the nine sections of the *Mantiq*, that is to say the science of expression in speech, firstly logic, then rhetoric and poetry."[122] *Hikma* means different things for different people; Barakat found that for some it signifies "general, universal truth that may be applied to situations to sum up both cause and effect. To others it is spiritual."[123] Goichas adds that the Qurān uses the term to indicate wisdom "which implies knowledge of spiritual truths."[124] In regard to oral tradition, Barakat points to the fact that *hikma* has a dual application; it is used to signify the wisdom expressed in proverbs and maxims, "the exact degree of which may only be determined by the situation in which they are used."[125] In other cases, *hikma* refers to the wise sayings themselves.[126] *Hikma*, then, can refer to content or text of traditional sayings.

The term *mathal* indicates what are called in English the "proverb" and the "simile." Gibb tells us that in Arabic the two meanings

> shade into one another, and it is often difficult to draw the dividing-line between them. For the art of the Arab has always been his speech, and with that intense feeling for words that is his birthright, the striking simile coined for the occasion by poet or orator rapidly acquired currency as a proverb.[127]

He continues, pointing out that the vivid simile and the strong emotional impact it carries is common in Arabic verbal art, including the Qurān, "where the same device is constantly employed to drive home both arguments and precepts."[128] Reynold A. Nicholson adds that the element of simile is present also in Arabic proverbial expressions referring to historical or legendary comparisons,[129] although Gibb cautions that there are many *amthāl* (proverbs) which do not employ similes.[130]

The Arabs generally make a distinction between two types of proverbs: *amthāl fushā* (classical proverbs) and *amthāl ᶜammīya* (colloquial proverbs). The classification of an item is based primarily on language. The *amthāl fushā* are in Classical Arabic, while the *amthāl ᶜammīya* are in the spoken dialects and are less rigid in line structure than their more formal cousins.

Co-existence of folk and literary versions of the same item within a single geographical and linguistic setting, where they intersect from time to time "to create crucial contact points between oral and written traditions"[131] is not rare in folklore and has been mentioned by numerous scholars.[132] Dan Ben-Amos, discussing this phenomenon with regard to narrative traditions, observes that "The oral and written forms have distinct social orbits, which criss-cross each other in a network of situations and contact points."[133] Certainly this is true of classical and colloquial Arabic proverbs, many of

which are identical but for differences of grammatical inflection or pronunciation. Collectors and members of the culture have, nevertheless, distinguished between the two types on the basis of formal considerations, and our concern here is with those proverbs maintained primarily in oral tradition.

## Structural Analysis of Proverbs and the Problem of Genres

Structural folklorists reverse the stance of functionalists and contextualists, asserting that the important thing is not what the proverb *does,* but what it *is*, at least when seeking generic definition. Although scholars do not fully agree on what exactly constitutes a "structural description," it is generally held to mean a determination of parts and their relationships to one another and to the whole. The immediate aim of structural analysis in folklore is the delineation and definition of genres, so that "once these genres have been defined in terms of internal morphological characteristics, one will be better able to proceed to the interesting problems of the function of folkloristic forms in particular cultures."[133] In addition, structuralists such as Robert A. Georges and Alan Dundes regard careful morphological analysis as the first step toward fruitful intergeneric comparison.[135] Dundes defends the structural analysis of proverbs as

> a valuable test case for the structural analysis of folklore generally. If it is truly possible to analyze the structure of the genres of oral literature, then it ought to be possible to analyze the structure of proverbs in particular...The great advantage of using proverbs rather than folktales, myths or ballads is obviously the relative simplicity of the genre. It makes sense therefore to attack the crucial theoretical questions of structural analysis by focusing upon a simple proverb rather than a complex myth.[136]

Furthermore, all the general theoretical problems associated with structural analysis of other genres are relevant to proverbs; the nature of minimal structural [emic] units; the questions of if and where the generic continuum is or can be segmented meaningfully, and; "the inevitable controversy as to whether the units of analysis are really in the data (God's truth) or are only a heuristic device found exclusively in the mind of the analyst (Hocus-Pocus)."[137]

The structural approach to proverbs is not entirely a child of the 1960's and 1970's. Marjorie M. Kimmerle tried in 1947 to devise a classification system for folk sayings, proverbs included.[138] This system classifies form according to syntax, and subject matter according to the names of concrete objects. The main difficulty with her scheme is its close affiliation with linguistic and syntactic formulae that concentrate, in Chomskian terms, on surface rather than deep structure. In studying folkloric phenomena, Dundes has suggested, and validly, that it would be more useful to concentrate on folkloristic rather than linguistic structure.[139]

Milner tried to reveal the nature of proverbs by forcing them into a structural system based on quadripartite form.[140] Utilizing his content study of Samoan proverb collections, he suggests that proverbs can be defined as traditional expressions utilizing four-level structure. The major flaw in Milner's system, which aims only at classification, is his assumption that those items which don't fit are "survivals" from earlier, more complete forms. Comments Dundes,

> This is not only a form of throwing away empirical data that doesn't [sic] fit a theory, but is itself a "survival" of English survival

> theory in which it is invariably assumed that the full, original form in the past has evolved or rather devolved through time suffering such ravages of attrition that only a fragment remains.[141]

Barley also warns against overstating the quadripartite system, which he describes in terms of double binary opposition.[142] He suggests that a more fruitful approach to intercultural comparative proverb studies would be "a description of the proverb's *external relations* (those between the given term or image and the hidden term or answer) and the *internal relations* (the logical connections between the proverbs own elements)...."[143]

Binary opposition is the foundation of the structural system proposed by Abrahams as well as that of Milner. In Abrahams's system, proverbs fall into four categories: positive equivalence ("Time is money"); negative equivalence ("Money isn't everything"); positive causation ("Haste makes waste"); negative causation ("Two wrongs don't make a right").[144]

Elli Köngäs Maranda and Pierre Maranda tested and modified Levi-Strauss's formula for the structural analysis of myth as a binary thought process seeking to mediate oppositions in the culture. The Marandas broadened the application of the formula in order to describe different genres, including the proverb.[145] Their model seems especially promising for analyzing mediational properties of proverbs in context, although they are concerned in their study with formal structure and enumerate only literal proverbs. This approach was found fruitful in the analysis of Moroccan proverbs about women.[146]

Still another definitive system based on structural considerations, categorizing proverbs as oppositional and non-oppositional, is

proposed by Dundes, who offers the following definition of the proverb:

> the proverb appears to be a traditional propositional statement consisting of at least one descriptive element, a descriptive element consisting of a topic and a comment. This means that proverbs must have at least two words. Proverbs which contain a single descriptive element are nonoppositional. Proverbs with two or more descriptive elements may be either oppositional or non-oppositional....Non-oppositional multi-descriptive element proverbs emphasize identificational features, often in the form of negation or a series of terms in complementary distribution. Some proverbs contain both identificational and contrastive features.[147]

With this structural definition of the proverb as a form containing minimally one descriptive element (one topic plus one comment), it is impossible theoretically to have a proverb consisting of one word.[148] One-word traditional items of folk speech, then, are not proverbs and go by other names. Similarly, some scholars prefer to differentiate literal from nonliteral proverbs on a nominal level, calling the former by some other term, such as aphorism or maxim; however, literal and metaphorical proverbs appear to be structurally similar, and non-oppositional proverbs may be of either type.[149] Furthermore, it is not inconceivable that a single proverb can, in different immediate contexts, be either literal or metaphorical. For instance, the English proverb "Let sleeping dogs lie" is frequently used metaphorically to mean that potentially disruptive matters which are, at the moment of proverb use, inactive *vis à vis* the situation at hand should not be stirred up; I have also heard it used, however, in literal reference to dozing canines.

Dundes's scheme suggests that there is a continuum ranging from oppositional to non-oppositional upon which individual proverbs lie:

> One can have a set of topic-comment constructions which are parallel or in series and are not in opposition....One can have a set in which either the topic or the comment is parallel or identical with the remaining element in opposition....Finally, one can have a set in which both topics and comments are in opposition.[150]

Dundes classifies those proverbs which are in opposition into five categories: negation, antithetical contradiction, privational contradiction, causal contradiction, and contrastive. He then claims that "All proverbs are potentially propositions which compare/contrast," comparison being the process of finding similar identificational features in common, whereas contrast consists of determining the differences."[151] Westermarck has pointed out that there are proverbs which contain both identificational and contrastive features[152] and Dundes speculates that "the phenomenon of simultaneous identificational/contrastive features might be a characteristic of proverbs in all cultures where the genre is found."[153] This hypothesis remains to be tested.

In any structural analysis, one fundamental problem is deciding whether the formulae being studied are those of image, message, or architecture; while the messages which may potentially be conveyed are infinite there seem to be finite number of proverb compositional or architectural formulae. Apparently proverb formulae operate relatively independently of the image and the message. As Finnish paremiologist Kuusi observes, the referential aspect, that is the message, of a proverb is not dependent upon the image employed. In other words, the same message may be conveyed by means of different images.[154]

Dundes summarizes the importance of structural studies of proverbs thus:

> The point is that differences in content do not necessarily mean that there are correlative differences in underlying structure.... the would-be analyst of proverbs should seek a syntagmatic or paradigmatic model for proverbs.[155]

Bertel Nathorst, on the other hand, warns that structural analysis is not the be all and end all of folkloristic studies:

> A structural definition...*may* have priority over a description of form or content when it is not dependent upon a particular culture and hence can be applied to phenomena in cultures which differ greatly from each other. However, structural description is far from being Columbus' egg, as it is often proclaimed to be. To begin with, it has proved extraordinarily difficult to produce structural descriptions which are exact and yield concrete results. Secondly, a structural description can never provide a solution to all problems.[156]

Only in the light of many types of analysis -- structural, functional, linguistic, content, etc. -- can we fully illuminate our subject and approach a complete and accurate understanding thereof.

## Proverbs in Context:

## Rhetorical Strategy and Function

Context and strategy are frequently mentioned in discussions of proverb definition and meaning for, as with any genre, it is not merely a question of *what* we are looking at in frozen textual terms which is important, but also what the item or set of items does for and means to the people who create and perpetuate it. Contextual and rhetorical-functional inquiries into proverb use must consider two major themes, which Finnegan has described. First, proverbs are inherently detached and generalized; "The speaker stands back, as it were, from the heat of the actual situation and draws attention, for himself and others, to

its wider implications." Secondly, because of the "oblique and allusive nature of expression through proverbs" they may be used effectively in a variety of ways.[157] The proverb, in Taylor's words, takes a complex, personal problem, encapsulates it in universality, and suggests a solution; "As a guide to life's problems, the proverb summarizes a situation, passes judgment, or offers a course of action. It is a consolation in difficulties large and small and a guide when a choice must be made. It expresses a morality suited to the common man."[158] Hence this traditional verbal form, says Abrahams, places a problem situation "in a recognizable category by providing a solution in traditional witty terms."[159] These terms, coupled with an objective frame of reference, achieve impersonalization through the use of abstract concepts ("Honesty is the best policy") or by illustrative concretions ("While the cat's away, the mice will play").[160]

Context is a vital element in the study of proverbs, for a proverb out of context may be devoid of meaning, or at least stripped of its multiple potential meanings, especially if it is a metaphorical proverb. In fact, William R. Bascom reminds us that the more metaphorical the proverb, the broader its range of potential applications.[161] Seitel adds that such non-literal proverbs rely for their interpretation on the

> metaphorical relationships between the imaginary situation presented in the proverb and the social situation to which it refers. To understand proverb use one must understand the mechanisms of this metaphor and how it is manipulated to serve social ends.[162]

Proverbs may be rather simple in their use of metaphor, but "the social rules which one must master in order to use and interpret proverbs cor-

rectly are probably the most numerous and complex of those for any genre," making proverbs themselves one of the most complicated of folkloric genres due to their extreme sensitivity to context.[163]

In his important work on Ibo proverbs, Seitel provides a model for understanding this metaphorical mechanism,[164] which, to operate fully, relies on immediate context and a usage strategy. He describes strategy of proverb usage as

> a plan for dealing with the situation which the proverb names. As an answer to an implied (or perhaps stated) question, "What to do?" the proverb is an attempt to resolve the personally felt conflicts which arise from perceived contradictions in a social situation. That is, a conversational proverb use is an attempt to solve a situational problem which the speaker perceives in a manner which the speaker believes is most suitable.[165]

These "perceived contradictions," when seen in Malinowskian terms, give rise to psychological anxieties which must be resolved if an individual or society is to maintain equilibrium. In the functionalist view, Trobrian fishermen use magic to dispel mental tensions[166]; Abrahams sees beliefs or proverbs as tools used to accomplish the same ends, for

> Both proverbs and superstitions confront and attempt to control recurrent anxiety situations by giving them a "name." Humans, as cultural beings, have a "rage for order." Anxiety arises with the intuition of chaos, of dissolution of group. Proverbs "name" situations in which social stability is repeatedly threatened, the potentially disruptive forces coming from within the group.[167]

Seen in logical terms by Paul D. Goodwin and Joseph W. Wenzel, proverbs provide a set of general, rational strategies for thinking about and attacking life's difficulties,[168] and Abrahams asserts that they do so in two ways: a proverb may be used to direct future action or to alter

an attitude toward something which has occurred already[169]; in Goodwin and Wenzel's terms, "The proverb defines the situation and prescribes a response."[170] If the question being faced is synchronic with the proverb context, explains Abrahams, the item used will suggest future action. If, however,

> the crisis has already passed but left a residual feeling of disorientation....though it still promotes the adoption of an attitude that will allow one to handle the same situation in the future, its immediate function is more of a realignment procedure -- the proverb or superstition arises to take the edge off the shock of the disorienting experience, reimposing a sense of order, by aligning this experience with others of its class through giving it its traditional name.[171]

For example, "Haste makes waste" suggests current and future courses of action and explains prior mistakes.[172] Part of the effectiveness of such strategic proverb use lies in the nature of proverbs as "self-contained units" which carry their own moral weight through coherent internal arguments[173] and appeal to tradition.

Goodwin and Wenzel have described the philosophical basis upon which proverb logic is built. Initially, there is the "argument by generalization" which begins with observations about a number of specific instances and moves to conclusions about the larger class to which these instances belong. The other logical argument is derived from classification, which "holds that what is true of a class will also be true of the individual members of that class."[174] Hasan El-Shamy points out that such reasoning is ego-involving, since it serves "to rationalize or entice behavior" or beliefs in a sociocultural frame of reference known to both the user and the hearer of the proverb.[175]

Where this sort of argument is used, assert Goodwin and Wenzel, "an expressed or implied identification is posited between the subject of the proverb and the referent in real life."[176]

In their search for logical consistency through content analysis, Goodwin and Wenzel found that Anglo-American proverbs reflect an implicit pattern typology for reasoning and argument, illustrate and comment upon legitimate patterns of inference, and caution against general and specific fallacies.[177] It is likely that similar research on proverb collections from other cultural traditions would yield comparably consistent results.

Ultimately, the basic function of the proverb, the one which applies the internal logic, is a rhetorical one; Goodwin and Wenzel explain that proverbs

> are used primarily in deliberation about questions of practical conduct. Whether people are deliberating internally or sharing counsel with one another, proverbs serve to establish norms for action. They endure not only because of their rhetorically effective form, but also because of their substantive capacity to shape attitudes and action.[178]

A rhetorically used proverb is a persuasive, argumentative device employed by a performer to affect an audience. Because the argument is embodied in traditional form, the technique is traditional as well. Folklore argues traditionally, using arguments and persuasive methods developed in the past to deal with recurring situations, and "the very traditional nature of expression is one of the important techniques of persuasion in a tradition-oriented group.[179] Thus Abrahams regards the function of folklore as a normative one which exerts cohesive pressures,

as "The problems specifically attacked by folk expressions are those that threaten the existence of the group."[180]

Cohesion and conflict resolution are undoubtedly functions served by some folklore at some times but, as do many other functionalist explanations, the one posed by Abrahams fails to account for the dysfunctional potential of proverbs and other folkloric genres. Nevertheless, most proverbs do articulate some temporary means of conflict resolution, as,

> Expressive folklore not only provides pleasure and catharsis but also attempts to guide effectively. This is achieved by allying sympathy and strategy with movement. Folklore, in other words, not only confronts and projects anxiety-producing situations; it also proposes potential solutions and attempts to produce action in accordance with its proposals.[181]

John C. Messenger assesses the affective use of proverbs as rhetorical devices affecting the course of justice in Anang legal tribunals of Nigeria, placing proverbs collected during court hearings in their cultural and juridical contexts.[182] Finnegan points to another practical aspect of proverbs -- their educational potential. Relatively formal education and transmission of cultural norms and ideals can be provided in non-literate societies by means of instruction though proverbs. Because their meaning is implicitly generalized, proverbs "are clearly a suitable and succinct form in which to verbalize socially prescribed actions and attitudes." Although not always, proverbs "are sometimes used quite formally and consciously as a vehicle to achieve the ends, and in some of the same contexts, that we associate with formal education."[183] Of course, education and transmission of cul-

tural traditions are accomplished through reiteration of proverbs and other traditional expressive forms in less formal and conscious contexts as well.

Proverbs are successful and effective rhetorical tools not only because they give solid advice, but also because they do so in what Goodwin and Wenzel term an intellectually pleasing manner: "The proverb moves the mind from the concrete image evoked by its familiar terms, through apprehension of the implicit metaphor, to a novel application to the problematic situation."[184] As Abrahams writes, the proverb "cloaks a recommended course of action in the garb of artful expression,"[185] which employs a clear relationship between the artistic description and the immediate referent. In the absence of this clear relationship, the proverb strategy fails.[186] The traditional expression implies that considerable deliberation has occurred at some time in regard to the problem which the proverb addresses; thus "Wit serves wisdom in this way -- as a device of control."[187] An analogical connection is thereby established, in Goodwin and Wenzel's socio-logical terms, between the proverb situation and the immediate problem situation.[188]

The strategic aspect of proverb use is especially evident when we recognize the simultaneous existence of contradictory proverbs in a single cultural tradition. Goodwin and Wenzel suggest that such contradictions propose a middle-of-the-road solution,[189] but it is more likely that the proverb user simply selects the item which supports his or her interests; selectivity is in fact the key to successful rhetorical strategy as described by Abrahams:

> Since the proverb-sayer (who may be described as a protagonist) is treating a social problem which may have multiple proverbial solutions, he is in the position of asserting one sanctioned approach over others equally sanctioned. The poetic, often metaphorical language of the proverb can be seen at least in part as a consequence of the protagonist's recognition of the fact that the assertion may not find common agreement. To avoid possible conflict over the content of the assertion and to psychologically remove the protagonist as personally-involved-arguer from his argument, his recommendation is couched in indirect and impersonal rhetoric. The proverb-sayer is strategically recognizing the complexity of action in the social sphere and formulating a recommendation in such a way as to de-emphasize possible interpersonal conflict and thereby to assure the greatest stability for the continuing conversation. For a statement dealing with social interaction to survive and become part of traditional expression, it will probably have to afford the proverb-sayer the kind of conflict protection that poetic language provides.[190]

Yet poetic language does not always provide conflict protection; the *hijā'* (satirical) poems of the pre-Islāmic Arabs were regarded as weapons of war as effective as physical combat.[191] Proverbs often embody aggressive tendencies in human behavior, as McKenna explains:

> For just as one of the uses of laughter has been seen as an attempt to make the individual conform to social norms by pointing out some absurdity in his conduct, so the proverb provides a laugh, but in all the more bloodless a way since the culpable target is a hypothetical person. The ventilation of aggression, generalized, sublimated, or ritualized, this drawing of lines, adds much to the spice and liveliness of the proverb's statement of truth. Here again, the proverb opens a field for the study of culture, both in the degree of aggressiveness evident in the proverbs of various societies, and in the targets and techniques used.[192]

The aggression inherent in intragroup conflict is tempered but not fully eliminated by certain usages of proverbs, because they appear to be objective and universally applicable; immediate contexts ridden with aggressive potential are placed in a wider context and thus made less threatening to the individual. Says Abrahams,

> Looked upon in this way, proverbs can be seen to regulate to a certain extent man's relation to his neighbors; they do this by setting forth solutions to the problems that arise between them repeatedly, phrasing them in such a way that they are at one and the same time concise, witty, memorable, forceful, and illustrative of past usage.[193]

The detached, objective effect is heightened by the use of metaphorical or analogical argumentative techniques.[194] The effective function of the proverb is fulfilled when the proverb's "message," as Marzal calls the principle abstracted from a number of particular cases and expressed metaphorically, "is applied to particular contexts of social interaction as an interpretation of the proverb's metaphor"[195] to influence an audience and thereby help the speaker achieve his or her desired ends.

In the final analysis, the proverb works because it is a complete and logical summary of a situation, consisting, in Marzal's view, of four aspects: summary of experience, advice rooted in experience, traditional form and sanctity, and day to day vitality in social interaction.[196] Furthermore, as Abrahams emphasizes, the descriptive elements in a proverb are organically and inevitably related;

> they make sense together, and they cohere in an active way....the combination of elements of description sets up an image or idea in an immediately meaningful and dynamic *Gestalt*. The clarity of this pattern in combination with the facility of phrasing of the proverb provides a tone of appropriateness and moral weight enabling it to function as a guide for future action.[197]

Materials of the proverb are organized according to rhythm, sound and meaning, both denotative and connotative. This organization provides "the needed feeling of order; this in turn promotes sympathy and encourages future action in accord with the dictates of the proverb."[198]

The dynamic relationship among descriptive elements furthers the sympathy and action; active verbs bind together the proverb's descriptive elements, relate them causally or equationally, and help in that way to promote the desired sympathetic response.[199]

## Style in Proverbs

On the basis of his research into Danish proverbs, Holbek asserts that there are two main directions which proverb style takes. First, because of the need to express "truth" or "wisdom" as laid down by tradition, proverbs must be "general, perspicuous, and straight-forward." Secondly, in order to remain vital in oral tradition, such ornamental speech forms as are commonly associated with poetry adorn proverbs and help distinguish them from ordinary speech.[200] These stylistic devices serve as mnemonic aids to tradition bearers,[201] and include meter, rhyme, slant rhyme, alliteration, assonance, personification, paradox, parallelism, simile and metaphor. Coupled with the terseness of most proverbs, such poetic language has been a boon to the preservation of proverbs in relatively fixed, sometimes even archaic, form over long periods of time.

Arabic proverb scholars confirm the use in their data of stylistic devices similar to those described by Holbek. Mahgoub, in reference to Egyptian proverbs, renders statistical information on the appearance of such poetic tools as various stress patterns, syllable structure, alliteration and rhyme.[202] Westermarck discusses the style of his Moroccan proverbs in more depth, citing seven commonly employed devices.[203] Hyperbole, suggests Westermarck, is widely employed in pro-

verbs because it is conducive to brevity. Parallelism is used to show similarity and contrast between sentences, between principle and subordinate clauses of the same sentence; sometimes a simple process of juxtoposition is used, as in "The beauty of a man is in his intelligence, and the intelligence of a woman is in her beauty"[EW3]. The Moroccan proverbs also make use of phonemic punning, in which similar sounding words with different meanings are opposed for effect; for instance, "A debt (*dayn*) destroys religion (*dĭn*)"[EW1062] contrasts debt, with its negative connotations, to religion, a positive force, for emphasis through both linguistic and connotative distinctions. Rhyme of various kinds is used, and includes: rhyming morphemes which succeed one another or are separated by only a particle, sometimes followed by an additional end rhyme; end rhyme; rhyming first and last words. Rhythm is employed, and normally involves rhythmic pauses which coincide with semantic pauses, although sometimes a rhythmic pause occurs without a pause in meaning. Alliteration, in which closely connected words beginning with the same consonant are used, and assonance are also commonly utilized in Arabic proverbs.

## Meaning in Proverbs

Aristotle said that proverbs were "metaphors from species to species."[204] While there are straightforward proverbs which do not employ metaphor or simile to make their points, the majority of proverbs are metaphorical; some proverbs express opinions and inherent value judgments explicitly, others implicitly.[205] The extensive use of metaphor allies the proverb closely with the riddle, and both belong

to a larger group of verbal strategies which Peter Farb discusses collectively as "gnomic expressions."[206] But, as Dundes points out, there is a special affinity between proverb and riddle, as both are frequently metaphorical, "compress thought to express a general truth,"[207] and "depend on 'topic-comment' constructions."[208] The differentiating feature is that the proverb provides the "answer" in that the referent must be known for the proverb to work, while the riddle, in contrast, asks a question which has an unexpected answer, the revelation of which was the point of the riddle. Georges and Dundes explain that the proverb, unlike the riddle, asserts without requiring an answer.[209] In some sociolinguistic environments, in fact, the same item may function interchangeably as proverb or riddle, depending on whether or not the audience knows the referent.

Paremiologists generally recognize a number of different gnomic forms as either proverbial or very closely related to proverbs. Collectors have since earliest times incorporated a wide variety of traditional materials in their collections, showing that more than one kind of saying might be included under the rubric "proverb."[210] The limitations and problems resulting from the lack of definition of the proverb are further compounded by the profusion of terms which most languages use to identify proverbs and traditional sayings; witness the problem Barakat encountered regarding the Arabic forms *mathal* and *qāʿida* (see pages 61-62). The situation is complicated even more, laments Marzal, when the terms of one language are compared with or translated into those of another language[211]; Milner places the blame for this confusion on the phenomenon whereby "Within each language, the words which refer

to traditional sayings are often not only vague, circular and synonomous, but they are also affected by the cultural horizon within which each language is used."[212]

Gnomic expression incorporates four signalling characteristics into what Farb terms "a strategy of language manipulation for the particular purpose of teaching, conveying wisdom, and expressing a philosophy."[213] *Meaning* is the first of these characteristics; it deals with the basic truths about health, love, poverty, wealth, goodness, and so on. Through these fundamental truths, gnomic expressions give advice and imply strategies for dealing with life, usually through metaphorical expression. *Sound*, in the shape of linguistic devices like alliteration, assonance, and rhyme, constitute the second characteristic of gnomic forms. Thirdly, *impersonal vocabulary forms* are stated directly or implied; in English, the copula verbal forms *is* and *are* are frequently used. Finally, *grammar* is typically in the present tense, which lends gnomic expressions an aura of universality. Grammatical constructions involving parallelism, symmetry and reversal of elements in the expression are not uncommon.[214] (see pages 91-92).

Agnes Szermerkémy has developed a four-level schema for studying proverb meaning, which she says should be investigated in terms of syntax, semantics and pragmatic function. The first level to be studied according to Szermerkémy is the syntactic level, at which we find an abstract invariant theme with which variants are connected to one another. This level is to be deduced by abstracting essential elements from thematically related proverbs[215]; in other words, a deep-structure is to be determined from surface-structure variants. Level B of the

analysis involves an exact semantic interpretation of the concrete, literal idea of the proverb, leading to level C, the metasemiotic level. Function, that is, the pragmatic role of the proverb in the life of the group which uses it, is the concern of level D.[216]

## Ethnographic Use of Proverbs and Proverb Collections

Proverbs cannot be understood without reference to the culture which spawns or adopts, and perpetuates, them, for their content and their employment are inextricably linked to the life style and world-view of that culture. Paremiologists have long regarded proverbs as a door to cultural understanding. As do other traditional expressive genres, proverbs illustrate a people's values and preoccupations and, as Abrahams remarks, in proverb-using groups they are particularly accessible for the collector as they appear in conversation as well as formal discourse.[217] Proverbs are also easily manipulated or misinterpreted, not only because they frequently are presented out of context but also because the existence of an item says nothing about its importance in the cultural setting. In Abrahams's words,

> Proverbs are expressions suggested in the popular mind at those times when a member of the group collides in some way with others, or at least threatens to do so. Therefore one can fruitfully use the occurrence of proverbs in context as an index to the places where the social structure of the community is weakest and needs the greatest amount of control. Consequently, the study of proverbs in a situation of that sort would call for an indication not only of the repertoire of sayings available to a group, but of how often individual items crop up.[218]

Of course, proverbs also occur in non-conflict situations, where they

may reflect general attitude rather than structural weakness (e.g., "There's no use crying over spilled milk").

In fact, proverbs have been long and widely viewed as reflective of cultural philosophy, because, writes Finnegan, "In proverbs the whole range of human experience can be commented on and analysed, generalizations and principles expressed in a graphic and concise form, and the wider implications of specific situations brought to mind."[219] Some proverbs from the same culture may conflict; the very same proverb may be used in different ways from one performance to the next. Therefore we must concur with Finnegan when she writes that

> If interpreted as literal injunctions and evaluations, clearly there is a contradiction. Instead they might be regarded as a way of summing up what is recognized as only one facet of the truth, to be used as and when it applies or appeals; then it is possible to appreciate more fully the flexible and subtle way in which, though a whole series of overtones and depths of meaning, proverbs represent "the soul of the people."[220]

One other difficulty of abstracting a "philosophy of life" from proverbs may also be cited, and that is that many of the proverbs found in use in one culture or society have international and intercultural currency. It is not the single proverb but rather the mosaic of all a culture's proverbs (and other expressive forms) and the frequency of their use which provides the full picture. The utilization of proverb collections for cultural analysis must be approached with utmost care, and compendiums must be recognized for what they are, described by Silverman-Weinreich as "not a delimited and consistent philosophical system devised by an individual, but at best a summation of many moods of several generations in different regions."[221] Yet there are some

cases of content consistency; my analysis of Westermarck's work on Moroccan proverbs[222] has shown, for instance, that adjectival and nominal associations with females and surrogate females are, in their totality, consistent.[223]

Some early content analyses sought to extrapolate attitudes and values from proverbs without consulting native informants about proverb meaning. Alfred Lister sought "lessons" in Chinese proverbs,[224] William Elliot Griffis claimed to explicate "the Japanese philosophy of life" through proverbs,[225] and Chinese religion was the target of Clifford Henry Plopper's attempts.[226] Many of these enthusiasts took their methods and idea from an early work of this type, Bishop Richard Trench's *On the Lessons of Proverbs*.[227] Raymond Firth succinctly states the most common error of these and other analyses which purport to point out evidence on the basis of proverbs alone: "the *real* is confounded with the ideal; to the native in everyday life is attributed the habitual practice of such moral behavior as is inculcated in his maxims and aphorisms."[228] Some later studies, such as A.A. Parker's analysis of Spanish proverbs, were based on similarly nebulous concepts, such as the possibility of unveiling a people's attitude toward life by examining what they laugh at in proverbs.[229] But humor and proverbs are hard to pin down separately as to their philosophical import and their combination more than doubles the difficulties.

Dundes and Mieder assert happily that comparative folklorists are generally more wary than many others of assuming that a proverb necessarily expresses a national character trait because they are aware of the likelihood that it has cross-cultural currency, adding that an-

thropologists appear more inclined to accept proverbs as reflective of local ideology. The truth, they conclude, undoubtedly lies somewhere between.[230] It is the sum total of proverbs and their frequency of use in a particular culture which is likely to express national or cultural predilictions. Of course, warns F.N. Robinson, there is always the danger of selecting data based on a preconceived idea and using them to support that idea.[231] Selectivity of this kind can be conscious or unconscious, and of it the analyst must always beware.

Nevertheless, proverbs can be useful for complementing cultural knowledge from other sources; Abrahams explains the value of proverbs for a student of a culture thus:

> because proverbs do "name" recurring social situations, the collection and investigation of them can lead to important insights into the cultural fixities of specific groups. We are, after all, interested in anything which a group has chosen to name, simply because they have invested that thing with cultural value. It seems terribly important to find out what social situations are regarded as problems in any group, and also what the approved solutions are, and no area of expressive culture can give this more quickly or clearly than proverbs.[232]

D.B. Shimkin and Pedro Sanjuan point out in their study of explicit meaning in Russian proverbs, furthermore, that "proverbs are more likely to represent the viewpoints and expressions current in given communities than individual inventions or preferences."[233] In longer folkloric and literary forms in which individual creativity becomes as important variable, it is sometimes difficult to determine where traditional concensus ends and personal opinion begins, but with proverb content this is unlikely to be so.

In order properly to interpret a body of proverbs as cultural indicators, it is necessary first to distinguish the national character of the set. Robinson suggests a useful system for doing so based on various factors: local setting and color; local stylistic devices, formulae and the like, and; national customs, traits, virtues or vices reflected in the proverbs.[234] As Whiting observes regarding potential cultural specificity,

> A caveat against the improper use of proverbial material to write the philosophical or spiritual life of a people does not deny that individual proverbs are peculiar to a nation or national group. The material objects used in proverbs will naturally vary from one region of the earth to another, and differences in linguistic structure will be reflected in proverbs, even after the proverbs have been translated from their original tongue.[235]

If individual proverbs can be peculiar to a group, or at least reflect aspects of culture specific to that group, then certainly collections of such proverbs will also reflect characteristics of the group. Such collections, analyzed with care and in conjunction with other cultural data, can lend insights into the society or culture at large.

Some further considerations posited by Taylor for judging the quality of a proverb collection are the number of items it contains, the arrangement of these items, acknowledgement of sources and citation of parallels in the same and other languages[236]; this evaluative system has been applied to collections used for the current study (see pages 2-17). Supplementation of the collections with ethnographic and contextual information is vital to proper interpretation of proverbs. As has been noted, multiple meanings may be applied to some proverbs by the people who use them; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett stresses the contextual

and emergent qualities of proverbs thus:

> When examined in terms of their actual use in specific situations, we see that a proverb can be made to express more than one meaning, that sometimes these meanings are contradictory, and that a proverb's meaning, rather than being autonomous of the proverb's use as we are led to believe by proverb collections, is indeed contextually specified.[237]

Proverb meaning is often emergent in a specific context; folklorists of the "performance school" therefore emphasize that "It is not the meaning of the proverb *per sé* that need be our concern but the meaning of the proverb performance."[238] Brenda Beck, an anthropologist who has worked with Tamil proverbs, concurs:

> If the proverbs drawn from the same culture can contradict one another, they probably do so because proverbs are used individually. Wisdom lies not in the corpus of proverbs itself but in the knowledge of when and how to use each individual one. They do not form a coherent body of ethical judgments by themselves.[239]

Even early on in paremiological history, some collectors warned against making judgments on the basis of proverbs alone. Westermarck points eloquently to the problems of "draw[ing] conclusions as to the actual prevalence of a mode of conduct from proverbs enjoining it"; he concludes with the suggestion that "although the proverbs of a people are in some way or other expressive of its life and character, they may frequently have to be interpreted in light of knowledge which they do not themselves supply."[240] In addition, care must be taken that temporal factors are considered in analyzing collections from differing time periods. Kuusi suggests that

> as there are historical shifts in worldview so there will be corresponding changes in proverb repertoires and usage. If this is so, then one may speculate that statistical samplings of favorite proverbs of a given era may possibly serve as reliable indeces of significant differences in fundamental philosophies of life from one generation to another.[241]

As in any field of inquiry, there are cautions which must be considered by scholars involved in content analyses of proverbs. But, studied with care, proverb content as well as performance can suggest valuable insights and useful comparative data for use with other ethnographic materials in the study of culture and tradition. Thus we proceed to a survey of the ethnographically documented honor and shame complex in both its cross-cultural and specifically Arab manifestations before moving on to the analysis of Arabic proverbs concerned with that complex.

NOTES

[1]Roger D. Abrahams, "Proverbs and Proverbial Expressions, *Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction*, ed. Richard M. Dorson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 118.

[2]See, for example: John Lewis Burckhardt, *Arabic Proverbs; or, The Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, 3rd. ed. (London: Curzon Press, 1972); James Richard Jewett, "Arabic Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases, Collected, Translated and Annotated," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 15 (1891): 28-120; A.P. Singer, *Arabic Proverbs*, ed. Enno Littmann (Cairo: F. Diemer, 1913); Edward A. Westermarck, *Wit and Wisdom in Morocco: A Study of Native Proverbs* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1930); Anis Frayha, *Modern Lebanese Proverbs*, 2 vols. (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1953); Fatma M. Mahgoub, *A Linguistic Study of Cairene Proverbs* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968); Jan Gabril, *Lebanon: Proverbs and Maxims* (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-Lubnani, 1972).

[3]See, for example: Burckhardt, *Arabic*; Jewett, "Arabic"; Westermarck, *Wit*; Frayha, *Modern*; Mahgoub, *Linguistic*.

[4](London: George Routledge and Sons, 1938).

[5]Jacques Auguste Cherbonneau, *"L'esprit de la conversation chez les musulmans de l'Afrique, étude ethnographique," Revue de géographie* 4 (1879): 25-32.

[6]See, for example: Richard M. Dorson, "Introduction," *Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), especially 15-20.

[7]Westermarck, *Wit*, 52.

[8]Alan Dundes, "On the Structure of the Proverb," *Proverbium* 25 (1975): 961.

[9]Beatrice Silverman-Weinreich, "Towards a Structural Analysis of Yiddish Proverbs," ed. Wolfgang Mieder and Alan Dundes, *The Wisdom of Many: Essays on the Proverb* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1981), 68.

[10]H.A.R. Gibb, "Introduction to the Proverbs of Arabia," ed. Selwyn Gurney Champion, *Racial Proverbs: A Selection of the World's Proverbs* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1938), xxxvii.

[11]C. Brockelmann, "Mathal," *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Vol. 3 (Leyden: E.J. Brill, 1913), 408.

[12]Anis Frayha, "Introduction," *A Dictionary of Lebanese Proverbs* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1974), xii.

[13]Gibb, "Introduction," xxxvii.

[14]Frayha, "Introduction," ix-xx.

[15]Brockelmann, "Mathal," 408.

[16]*Ibid.*

[17]Frayha, "Introduction," xiii.

[18]Brockelmann, "Introduction," 409.

[19]Gibb, "Introduction," xxxviii.

[20]*Ibid.*

[21](Cairo: Fihrist, n.d.); cf. Brockelmann, "Mathal," 409.

[22]See, for example, James T. Monroe, "Oral Composition in Pre-Islamic Poetry," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 3 (1972): 1-53.

[23]Brockelmann, "Mathal," 409.

[24]*Ibid.*

[25]Ignace Goldziher, *A Short History of Classical Arabic Literature*, trans. by Joseph Desomogyi (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1966), 35; Reynold A. Nicholson, *A Literary History of the Arabs* (Cambridge: University Press, 1953), 31.

[26]Cf. Ilse Lichtenstadter, "al-Mufaddal," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Vol. (Leyden: E.J. Brill, 1913), 489; Goldziher, *Short History*, 35.

[27]Goldziher, *Short History*, 35.

[28]Brockelmann, "Mathal," 409.

[29]C. Brockelmann, "al-ᶜAskarī," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Vol. 1 (Leyden: E.J. Brill, 1913), 489; Goldziher, *Short History*, 35.

[30]Brockelmann, "Mathal," 409.

[31]*Ibid.*

[32]*Ibid.*; Goldziher, *Short History*, 35; cf. Brockelmann, "al-Maidani," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Vol. 3 (Leyden: E.J. Brill, 1913), 144-145.

[33]Brockelmann, "Mathal," 409.

[34]Gibb, "Introduction," xxxix.

[36](Beirut: n.p., 1871).

[37](Cairo:n.p., n.d.).

[38](Cairo:n.p., n.d.).

[39](Cairo: n.p., 1956).

[40](Baghdad: Matba$^{c}$at As$^{c}$ad, 1962; cf. Salih J. Altoma, review of Hanafī, *Journal of American Folklore* 77 (1964): 171.

[41]Cf. Dundes, "Structure," 961.

[42]*Ibid.*

[43]See, for example: Brenda F. Beck, "Body Imagery in the Tamil Proverbs of South India," *Western Folklore* 38 (1979): 21-41; Sheila K. Webster, "Women, Sex and Marriage in Moroccan Proverbs," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 14 (1982): 173-184.

[44]Dundes, "Structure," 961.

[45]*Ibid.*

[46]Dell Hymes, "The Ethnography of Speaking," *Anthropology and Human Behavior*, ed. Thomas Gladwin and William C. Sturtevant (Washington, D.C.: The Anthropological Society of Washington, 1962), 16.

[47]E. Ojo Arewa and Alan Dundes, "Proverbs and the Ethnography of Speaking Folklore," *American Anthropologist* 66 (1964): 70-85.

[48]Peter Seitel, "Proverbs: A Social Use of Metaphor," *Genre* 2 (1969): 143-161.

[49]Robert A. Barakat, *A Contextual Study of Arabic Proverbs* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1980). FF Communication No. 226.

[50]Kwesi Yankah, "Toward a Performance-Centered Theory of the Proverb," *Critical Arts* 3 (1983): 29-43.

[51]Dundes, "Structure," 961.

[52]Franzeska Baumgarten, "A Proverb Test for Attitude Measurement," Mieder and Dundes, *Wisdom*, 230-241.

[53]Paul Satz and L.T. Carroll, "Utilization of the Proverbs Test as a Projective Instrument: An Objective Approach through Language Behavior," *Journal of General Psychology* 67 (1962): 205-213.

[54]Wolfgang Mieder, "The Use of Proverbs in Psychological Testing," *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 15 (1978): 45-55.

[55]Archer Taylor, *The Proverb* (Hatboro, PA: Folklore Associates, 1962).

[56]B.J. Whiting, "Proverbs and Proverbial Sayings: Introduction," *The Frank C. Brown Collection of North Carolina Folklore*, Vol. 1, ed. Newman Ivey White (Durham: Duke University Press, 1952), 331.

[57]B.J. Whiting, "The Nature of the Proverb," *Harvard Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature* 14 (1932): 302.

[58]*Ibid.*, 273.

[59]Silverman-Weinreich, "Structural," 69.

[60]Bengt Holbek, "Proverb Style," *Proverbium* 15 (1970): 54.

[61]Roger D. Abrahams, "On Proverb Collecting and Proverb Collections," *Proverbium* 8 (1967): 181.

[62]Barakat, *Contextual*, 4-17.

[63]*Ibid.*, 4.

[64]*Ibid.*, 14.

[65]*Ibid.*, 4.

[66]*Ibid.*, 15.

[67]*Ibid.*

[68]*Ibid.*, 16-17.

[69]*Ibid.*, 17.

[70]Nigel Barley, "A Structural Approach to the Proverb and Maxim With Special Reference to the Anglo-Saxon Corpus," *Proverbium* 20 (1972): 737-750.

[71]That is, "A form different from that of ordinary speech...." Ruth Finnegan, "Proverbs in Africa," *Oral Literature in Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 389-418.

[72]"*Los refranos son sentencias breves*" ("Proverbs are short statements...."), Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quijote de la Mancha*, ed. Martin de Riquer (Barcelona: Editorial Juventud, 1968). Cf. Abrahams, "Proverbs and Proverbial," 119.

[73]Finnegan, "Proverbs," 393.

[74]*Ibid.* Cf. Melville J. Herskovits and SiE Ta'gbwE, "Kru Proverbs," *Journal of American Folklore* 43 (1930): 226.

[75]Barley, "Structural," 741.

[76]Margaret M. Bryant, *Proverbs and How to Collect Them* (Greensboro, NC: American Dialect Society, Publication No. 4, 1945), 3.

[77]Barley, "Structural," 741.

[78]*Ibid.*

[79]Archer Taylor, "Proverb," *Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend*, Vol. 2, ed. Maria Leach (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1950), 902. Cf. Archer Taylor, "The Collection and Study of Proverbs," *Proverbium* 8 (1967): 161; Abrahams, "Proverbs and Proverbial," 119; Dundes, "Structural," 970-971.

[80]Abrahams, "Proverbs and Proverbial," 119.

[81]Peter Seitel, "Proverbs: A Social Use of Metaphor," *Genre* 2 (1969): 145.

[82]Mahgoub, *Linguistic*, 13-19.

[83]Westermarck, *Wit*, 5-41.

[84]*Ibid.*, 2.

[85]Silverman-Weinreich, "Structural," 71.

[86]Holbek, "Proverb," 54.

[87]Dundes, "Structural," 971.

[88]Mahgoub, *Linguistic*, 1-2.

[89]Raymond Firth, "Proverbs in Native Life, with Special Reference to those of the Maori," *Folk-lore* 37 (1926): 134-153, 245-270.

[90]Cf. Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God: Occidental Mythology* (New York: Viking, 1964), 520-521, quoted by John F. McKenna, "The Proverb in Humanistic Studies: Language, Literature and Culture; Theory and Classroom Practice," *The French Review* 48 (1974): 381.

[91]McKenna, "Huamnistic," 381.

[92]Holbek, "Proverb," 54.

[93]G.B. Milner, "*De l'armature des locutions proverbiales: essai de taxonomie sémantique,*" *L'Homme* 9 (1969): 54.

[94]A.J. Greimas, *Du sens: essais sémiotiques* (Paris: Seuil, 1970), 310.

[95]Pierre Crepeau, "The Invading Guest: Some Aspects of Oral Transmission," *Yearbook of Symbolic Anthropology* 1 (1978), 11-12.

[96]*Ibid.*

[97]Westermarck, *Wit*, 54.

[98]Taylor, *Proverb*, 5-10.

[99]Abrahams, "Proverbs and Proverbial," 119.

[100]Finnegan, "Proverbs," 31.

[101]Heda Jason, "Proverbs in Society: The Problem of Meaning and Function," *Proverbium* 17 (1971): 619.

[102]*Ibid.*, 619.

[103]*Ibid.*, 617.

[104]Seitel, "Proverbs," 130.

[105]Jason, "Proverbs," 617.

[106]Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Toward a Theory of Proverb Meaning," *Proverbium* 22 (1973): 821.

[107]Barley, "Structural," 740.

[108]*Ibid.*, 741.

[109]George Herzog and Charles G. Bloah, *Jabo Proverbs from Liberia* (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), 7-8.

[110]McKenna, "Humanistic," 381-382.

[111]*Ibid.*

[112]*Ibid.*

[113]J. David Sapir and J. Christopher Crocker, "Preface," *The Social Use of Metaphor: Essays on the Anthropology of Rhetoric* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1977), x.

[114]"*Paraceme, Sancho, que no hay refran que so sea verdadero, porque todos son sentencias sacadas de la misma experiencia, madre de las ciencias todas.*" Cervantes, *Don Quijote*, Part 1, Chapter 2.

[115]Finnegan, "Proverbs," 25.

[116]*Ibid.*, 26.

[117]Barley, "Structural," 741.

[118]*Hadīth* means narrative or talk. With the definite article *al* it is used in the special sense meaning a Tradition of the Prophet, or *hadīth nabawī*.

[119]J. Robson, "Hadith," *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed. (Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1960), Vol. 3, 23.

[120]*Ibid.*, 23; Barakat, *Contextual*, 11.

[121]Barakat, *Contextual*, 12.

[122]A.M. Goichas, "Hikma," *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960), Vol. 3, 378.

[123]Barakat, *Contextual*, 13.

[124]Goichas, "Hikma," 378.

[125]Barakat, *Contextual*, 13.

[126]*Ibid.*

[127]Gibb, "Introduction," xxxvii.

[128]*Ibid.*

[129]Nicholson, *Literary*, 5, 16, 50, 84, 91, 109, 244, 292, 373.

[130]Gibb, "Introduction," xxxvii.

[131]Dan Ben-Amos, "Introduction," *Folklore Genres* (Austin: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1976), xxxiii; cf. Ruth Finnegan, "The Social, Linguistic, and Literary Background," *Oral Literature in Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 48-80.

[132]See, for example, Linda Dégh, "Folk Narrative," *Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction*, ed. Richard M. Dorson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 53-83; Elfriede Moser-Rath, "Literature and Folk Tradition: Sources for Folk Narrative of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 5 (1968): 175-186; Archer Taylor, "Folklore and the Student of Literature," *Pacific*

*Spectator* 2 (1948): 216-223.

[133]Ben-Amos, "Introduction," xxxiii.

[134]Robert A. Georges and Alan Dundes, "Toward a Structural Definition of the Riddle," *Journal of American Folklore* 76 (1963): 111.

[135]*Ibid.*

[136]Dundes, "Structure," 962.

[137]*Ibid.*

[138]Marjorie M. Kimmerle, "A Method of Collecting and Classifying Folk Sayings," *Western Folklore* 6 (1947): 351-366.

[139]Dundes, "Structure," 962; cf. Georges and Dundes, "Riddle."

[140]G.E. Milner, "Quadripartite Structures," *Proverbium* 14 (1969): 379-383.

[141]Dundes, "Structure," 963-964.

[142]Barley, "Structural," 737-750.

[143]Angel Marzal, *Gleanings from the Wisdom of Mari* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1976), 3.

[144]Abrahams, "Proverbs and Proverbial," 120-121.

[145]Elli Köngäs Maranda and Pierre Maranda, *Structural Models in Folklore and Transformational Essays* (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), 30; cf. Claude Levi-Strauss, *L'origine des manieres de table: Mythologique* III (Paris, 1968).

[146]Webster, "Women," 173-184.

[147]Dundes, "Structure," 970-971.

[148]*Ibid.*, 965-966.

[149]*Ibid.*, 966.

[150]*Ibid.*, 970.

[151]*Ibid.*, 967.

[152]Westermarck, *Wit*, 5-6, quoted by Dundes, "Structure," 969.

[153]Dundes, "Structure," 969.

[154]*Ibid.* Cf. Matti Kuusi, *Towards an International Type-System of Proverbs* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia Academie Scientarum Fennica, 1972), FF. Communication No. 211.

[155]Dundes, "Structure," 969.

[156]Bertel Nathorst, "Genres, Form and Structure in Oral Tradition," *Temenos* 3 (1968): 129-130.

[157]Finnegan, "Proverbs," 27.

[158]Archer Taylor, "The Study of Proverbs," *Proverbium* 1 (1965): 7.

[159]Abrahams, "Proverbs and Proverbial," 121.

[160]*Ibid.*, 122.

[161]William R. Bascom, "Folklore Research in Africa," *Journal of American Folklore* 77 (1964): 16.

[162]Seitel, "Proverbs," 147.

[163]*Ibid.*, 160.

[164]*Ibid.*, 147.

[165]*Ibid.*, 130.

[166]Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (London: Routledge and Sons, 1922).

[167]Roger D. Abrahams, "A Rhetoric of Everyday Life: Traditional Conversational Genres," *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 32 (1968): 47.

[168]Paul D. Goodwin and Joseph W. Wenzel, "Proverbs and Practical Reasoning: A Study in Socio-Logic," *Wisdom*, ed. Mieder and Dundes, 158.

[169]Abrahams, "Proverbs and Proverbial," 121.

[170]Goodwin and Wenzel, "Proverbs," 142.

[171]Abrahams, "Rhetoric," 47.

[172]*Ibid.*

[173]Abrahams, "Proverbs and Proverbial," 151.

[174]Goodwin and Wenzel, "Proverbs," 150-157.

[175]Hasan M. El-Shamy, "Folkloric Behavior: A Theory for the Study of the Dynamics of Traditional Culture," Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1967), 170-173.

[176]Goodwin and Wenzel, "Proverbs," 150-157.

[177]*Ibid.*

[178]*Ibid.*, 142.

[179]Roger D. Abrahams, "Introductory Remarks to a Rhetorical Theory of Folklore," *Journal of American Folklore* 81 (1968): 146.

[180]*Ibid.*

[181]*Ibid.*, 149.

[182]John C. Messenger, Jr., "The Role of Proverbs in a Nigerian Judicial System," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 15 (1959): 64-73.

[183]Finnegan, "Proverbs," 32.

[184]Goodwin and Wenzel, "Proverbs," 143.

[185]Abrahams, "Introductory," 150.

[186]*Ibid.*, 151.

[187]*Ibid.*, 150.

[188]Goodwin and Wenzel, "Proverbs," 150.

[189]*Ibid.*

[190]Abrahams, "Rhetoric," 50.

[191]See Nicholson, *Literary*, 73.

[192]McKenna, "Humanistic," 382-383.

[193]Abrahams, "Rhetoric," 48.

[194]*Ibid.*

[195]Marzal, *Gleanings,* 12.

[196]*Ibid.*

[197]Abrahams, "Introductory," 151.

[198]*Ibid.*

[199]*Ibid.*

[200]Holbek, "Proverb," 55; Jan Harold Brunvand, "Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases," *The Study of American Folklore: An Introduction* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1968), 38-47.

[201]Cf. Hasan M. El-Shamy, "Structure and Meaningfulness: Memorization as a Function of Structure," in "Folkloric Behavior,

[202]Mahgoub, *Linguistic*, 28.

[203]Westermarck, *Wit,* 1-53.

[204]*Ibid.*, 2.

[205]*Ibid.*, 2-3.

[206]Peter Farb, *Word Play: What Happens When People Talk* (New York: Bantam Books, 1973), 117.

[207]*Ibid.*

[208]Dundes, "Structure," 965.

[209]Georges and Dundes, "Riddle," 117.

[210]Taylor, "Collection," 161.

[211]Marzal, *Gleanings*, 3.

[212]Milner, "Quadripartite," 380.

[213]Farb, *Word*, 118.

[214]*Ibid.*

[215]Agnes Szemerkémy, "A Semiotic Approach to the Study of Proverbs," *Proverbium* 24 (1972): 935.

[216]*Ibid.*, 936.

[217]Abrahams, "Collecting," 181-183.

[218]Abrahams, "Rhetoric," 148.

[219]Finnegan, "Proverbs," 34-35.

[220]*Ibid.*

[221]Silverman-Weinreich, "Structural," 69.

[222]Westermarck, *Wit*.

[223]Webster, "Women."

[224]Alfred Lister, "Chinese Proverbs and Their Lessons," *Wisdom*, ed. Mieder and Dundes, 242-256.

[225]William Elliot Griffis, *Proverbs of Japan: A Little Picture of the Japanese Philosophy of Life as Mirrored in Proverbs* (New York: n.p., 1924).

[226]Clifford Henry Plopper, *Chinese Religion Seen Through Proverbs* (Shanghai: n.p., 1926).

[227](New York: Redfield, 1853).

[228]Firth, "Proverbs," 134-153, 245-270.

[229]A.A. Parker, "The Humour of Spanish Proverbs," *The Humour of Spanish Proverbs* (London: Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian Councils, 1963), 3-23.

[230]Dundes and Mieder, *Wisdom*, 284.

[231]F.N. Robinson, "Irish Proverbs and Irish National Character," *Wisdom*, ed. Mieder and Dundes, 290.

[232]Abrahams, "Collecting," 183.

[233]D.B. Shimkin and Pedro Sanjuan, "Culture and World View: A Method of Analysis Applied to Rural Russia," *American Anthropologist* 55 (1953): 329.

[234]Robinson, "Irish," 290.

[235]Whiting, "Proverbs," 332.

[236]Taylor, "Study," 2.

[237]Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Toward a Theory," 821.

[238]*Ibid.*, 826.

[239]Beck, "Body," 27.

[240]Westermarck, *Wit*, 54.

[241]Quoted by Mieder and Dundes, *Wisdom*, 275.

# CHAPTER IV

# HONOR AND SHAME:

# CROSS-CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

## The Measure of the Man

Honor as a measure of personal and familial worth is a pervasive fixture of Middle Eastern, Mediterranean, and some other societies. Honor, shame, and their attendant concepts, such as that of *machismo*, are recurrent themes in the folklore and written literature of a vast spectrum of societies existing within different cultural frames, from Catholic Mediterranean Spain to Muslim and mountainous Afghanistan. In view of the great and widespread emphasis on the acquisition and preservation of honor, however it is specifically elaborated in a society, it is not surprising that a vast body of scholarly literature has emerged, enlivened by much debate and speculation on the nature of the honor/shame complex in general, and of its meaning as manifested in specific sociocultural contexts.[1]

The crux of the honor/shame complex is the evaluation of a situation which implies choice within a system of values shared by two or more actors. J.G. Peristiany suggests that the ideal choice establishes "a basis for evaluation, communication, and prediction" and a "common value language"[2]; other-than-ideal options are judged by their relative distance from the ideal. The attribution of honor or shame to a situation, action, or person, than, is a form of symbolic communication,

often attended by other communicative modes such as language (gossip and verbal abuse or praise) or action (punishment, ostracism, retaliation).

Immediate context, although vital, is not the only variable which must be considered in evaluating social action, whether in regard to honor and shame or other cultural values. Peristiany notes that any valid assessment of social behavior must be made in reference to the social distance between the actors and the content of the action itself[3]; of course, the broader sociocultural matrix also plays a role in rendering action meaningful. Social position certainly affects both a person's conduct and its evaluation by the actor, the group, and the analyst, although honor in some measure is an indispensible ingredient of acceptability in an honor-bound society regardless of an individual's position or achievements. The more honor attributed to an individual, the more he or she approximates society's notion of human perfection. Furthermore, adds Peristiany, those societies which lay great stress on honor are very often permeated by religious values; the man or woman who approaches the honor ideal tends also to approach the religious ideal, so that an evaluation of value judgments concerned with honor and shame "involves the study of the supreme temporal ideals of a society and their embodiment in the ideal type of man."[4] Peristiany opposes "temporal ideals" to "saintly ideals"; he write, "'Temporal,' that is, in contrast to the ideal of "saintliness," which surpasses honor in that "saintliness is above honor and...there is nothing above saintliness."[5] The concepts of sainthood and saintliness are beyond the scope of the present discussion; it is worth noting, however, that

religion does tend to permeate many of the societies in which honor and shame are at the poles of a major continuum for the evaluation of human behavior and status. Certainly this is true of Arab societies.

If honor is requisite to fulfillment of an ideal, it is also more. Honor is the basis of a social personality which reflects social ideals and is used as the standard of what is considered to be the representative and proper personality type by which individuals in a particular society evaluate one another. As Peristiany explains,

> Honor is at the apex of the pyramid of temporal social values and it conditions their hierarchical order. Cutting across all other social classifications it divides social beings into two fundamental categories, those endowed with honor and those deprived of it.[6]

If the rules of honor are obeyed, then it is possible to violate other rules of society which, in relation to those of honor, are held in lesser regard. In fact, Jane Schneider argues, honor can legitimate various forms of limited aggression, "making acts of imposition, encroachment, and usurpation morally valid in the eyes of nearly everyone except the victim."[7] Thus honor can in some situations operate as a surrogate for physical violence in the pursuit of economic interests.[8] Overt aggression can also be incited by the emphasis on honor in conjunction with economics, as for instance when raids are instituted for the acquisition of both material goods and honor[9] or when physical assaults and even homocides are committed as acts of revenge to regain honor.[10]

Society renders judgment on a person's relative standing on a continuum extending from the ideal of honor to its antithesis, shame.

A person of honor is one who is virtuous and, perhaps more importantly, who enjoys a good reputation. Honor also provides the socially-determined scale upon which a person weighs his or her own value; society both shapes and validates the individual's self-estimation, or what Julian Pitt-Rivers lables the "claim to pride."[11] In this way honor

> provides the nexus between the ideals of a society and their reproduction in the individual through his aspiration to personify them. As such, it implies not merely an habitual preference for a given mode of conduct, but the entitlement to a certain treatment in return. The right to pride is the right to status (in the popular as well as the anthropological sense of the word), and status is established through the recognition of a certain identity.[12]

A point of honor, then, is the "basis of the moral code of an individual who sees himself always through the eyes of others, who has need of others for his existence, because the image he has of himself is indistiguishable from that presented to him by other people."[13] By extension, a person's actions in honor-bound societies are in many cases affected more by the external pressures of social opinion than by individual perceptions of moral right, although the two may become, through enculturation, virtually inseparable. Thus the need for an honorable image serves both as a device for social control and a shaper of self-concept.

Society not only adjudicates the question of a person's honor, but frequently determines the degree of shame and necessary redress required in the case of a violation of the honor code. Indeed, just as public recognition of honor is vital to having honor, public knowledge is often a necessary element of insult, for, although a person may feel dishonored in the case of a private affront, Pitt-Rivers remarks that

in the cross-cultural literature on honor

> there is no disagreement that the extent of the damage to reputation relates to the range of public opinion within which the damage is broadcast....Public opinion forms therefore a tribunal before which the claims to honour are brought, "the court of reputation" as it has been called, and against its judgments there is no redress. For this reason it is said that public ridicule kills.[14]

In some cases the pressures associated with public awareness of a breach of honor may preclude forgiveness on the part of the wronged party; that which is borne privately may be pardoned, but the public affront must be avenged.

Honor and shame should not, however, be thought of merely as estimations of approval and disapproval. They also display a general structure exemplified in the institutions and traditional evaluations of specific cultures. Pitt-Rivers has compared honor to magic, saying that its principles "appear everywhere," although "they are clothed in conceptions which are not exactly equivalent from one place to another."[15] If by this he means that basic principles appear wherever the honor/shame complex is an important social construct, then his point is valid. However, it must be remembered that honor and shame are not universally important in world cultures. Furthermore, continues Pitt-Rivers, honor and magic are both self-validating on the basis of facts to which they apply their own interpretations, and thus they become enmeshed in the conflicts of general social structure manifested in contradictions.[16] Such contradictions, however, even when perceived by members of a society, are usually minimized or ignored altogether, and thus play little or no role in the social applications of ideal judgments.

Pitt-Rivers implies that honor is a universal aspect of human cultures. Certainly people everywhere make judgments and establish standards by which individual worth is evaluated. Peristiany reminds us, however, that honor and shame are far more pervasive in small, insular societies where personal, face-to-face, rather than anonymous, relations are of primary importance and where the actor's social personality is as crucial as his office. Spheres of action within such societies are well-defined, non-overlapping and non-competitive; they exist within the minimal cohesive group, be it small or large family or clan. Outside such groups the action spheres are much more nebulous, non-exclusive and competitive.[17] But in both contexts the honor/shame ranking, where it exists, is insecure and unstable. Honor, even when inherited with the family name, is ever on the line, in need of assertion, vindication, protection in the face of the omnipotence of public opinion. Thus, as Peristiany has argued, for the individual who is identified by membership in a social group, the honor of the person and the honor of the group are reciprocal, so that "any aspersion on his honour is an aspersion on the honour of his group"[18] and vice versa. Because the link between the individual's and the group's honors is so basic to the system, the individual

> is forceably cast in the role of his group's protagonist. When the individual emerges with a full social personality of his own, his honour is in his sole keeping. In this insecure, individualistic world, where nothing is accepted on credit, the individual is constantly forced to prove and assert himself. Whether as the protagonist of his group or as a self-seeking individualist, he is constantly "on show." He is forever courting the public opinion of his "equals" so that they may pronounce him worthy.[19]

The individual's peers "pronounce him worthy" -- or unworthy -- in an honor-bound society in terms of fulfillment of the norm, the *status quo*, of the expected behavior patterns which vouch for personal worth. In the same vein, departure from the norm casts the actor in a suspect, negative light.

Bourdieu points out that the pressures of group observation in small societies is perpetual;

> Penned inside this enclosed microcosm in which everybody knows everybody, condemned without the possibility of escape or relief to live with others, beneath the gaze of others, every individual experiences deep anxiety about "people's words"....[20]

The individual is haunted by concern with what others are doing and what they are saying about what he or she is doing. Thus "transactions of honor,"[21] as Pitt-Rivers calls behaviors significant to the honor/shame continuum, reconcile social ideals with their manifestations in individual action.

Pitt-Rivers also reminds us that it should not be assumed that social judgments based on honor are uniformly displayed either inter- or intraculturally. A value system is not a neatly consistent composite of abstract principles which all members of a society uniformly obey. Rather it is a mélange of related but differentially applied concepts.[22] Interpretation and application of the rules may vary drastically from one situation to the next according to such factors as the degree of public proliferation of knowledge in each case, the status group(s) involved (defined by age, gender, class, occupation, etc.), and the immediate social context. Discrepancies in honor systems can

be resolved only in individual contexts, for

> Like tropical fish whose radiant colours fade once they are taken from the water, the concepts which compose such a system retain their exact significance only within the environment of the society which nurtured them and which resolves, thanks to its internal structuring, their conflicts with each other.[23]

A society may elect, of course, to ignore rather than resolve some or all of the inconsistencies in its system. Failure (or refusal) to acknowledge disparities may in fact *be* the solution to the philosophical problems they pose.

In all that has been said here, and in much of what has been written before, a clear and substantive definition of "honor" is lacking. In light of the extensive variations in the elements of honor in individual societies, a precise definition is elusive. Nevertheless, certain common elements can be extrapolated from the literature.

Honor is, apparently, in those societies where it holds sway, perceived as a tangible possession, a pie to be eaten whole rather than in pieces. Like being pregnant, one either is or is not honorable. Furthermore, just as the components of honor are elaborated in specific sociocultural contexts, so too an individual's honor is a local concern; thus J. Davis has noted that honor

> cannot be measured or assessed, except very roughly, by an outside observer. Nor can unattached outsiders be assessed readily, for that implies a moral relationship. Bureaucratic rank and class position are transferable from one community to another, but for a man to have honor he must live on his own land.[24]

Hence the greater preoccupation of people in small than in large communities with honor. In the anonymous crush of the urban crowd the

transcience of relationships and multiplicity of groups within which a person functions and among which he or she moves reduce or elimiate altogether the importance of individual or family honor. But in the personalized and ever-watchful small community, whether village, clan, or urban quarter, in which all group members are mutually known, behavior is under continuous surveillance and honor, where the concept exists at all, is pervasive. Positions within a community imply assertions of particular moral worth and evaluation by others, usually neighbors.[25] Bourdieu supports Davis's notion, writing that where all members of the group are known to one another, "the control of public opinion is exercised at every moment, and community feeling is experienced with the highest possible intensity."[26]

## Honor and Women

A large proportion of the literature on honor deals with that part of a man's honor which is invested in the women of his group, although the configuration of the social ties involving a particular woman in a man's honor varies from one culture to another. Meeker observes that among Black Sea Turks, for instance, marriage transfers both the control of a woman's behavior and the vulnerability to her misbehavior, in terms of loss of honor, from her father to her husband.[27] In contrast, an Arab woman remains forever a member of her paternal lineage, and her male paternal kin remain vulnerable to her actions and reputation. Thus while her husband assumes responsibility for controlling the woman and keeping her from behaving dishonorably, her paternal male relatives retain their liability for punishing her should

the controls fail. Hence the idealization in Arab culture of marriages between agnatic kin, since such alliances invest the husband's own honor more directly in his wife's behavior than if she were not a member of his patriliny.

In any case, a woman's control of her male relatives' honor hinges primarily, although not exclusively, on her sexuality. There is in honor-bound societies a profound concern with the purity of women as exemplified in the emphasis on premarital virginity and marital fidelity. Concurrently, male virility and prowess in sexual matters are vital, and the inherent conflict in these polar emphases has resulted in varying means of minimizing the potential violations of social ideals. Veiling and seclusion of women in differing degrees are typical barriers erected to prevent such transgressions, and retributions of variable severity are standard fare where the barriers break down.

As should be expected when dealing with such an emotionally charged area as sexuality, many explanations have emerged in regard to the links between honor, shame and sex; those which deal with the situation in Arab socities are discussed in the next chapter. Scholars and philosophers of various ilk have posited many points of view, but Davis suggests what might be an important if subtle economic current running through this vast intercultural river which on the surface is concerned with sex as a moral issue. He write that

> honor is not primarily to do with sexual intercourse, with copulation, but with the performance of sexual roles: to be good of your kind is to have honour and that may include the ability to protect women from the sexual advances of other men and to attack other men through their women; but in reality sexual roles are chiefly economic and domestic.[28]

Thus the honor of sexuality, like that of hospitality, fighting courage, and so forth, may be in part a matter of proper role fulfillment in the interest of economic and social stability and security. Evelyn Kessler suggests that "When women become valued for their reproductive capacities rather than for their economic production the society tends to become more stringently divided along sexually defined lines, and women are more closely confined to the private sphere."[29] Because her sexuality is valued, it must also be "guarded"; her behavior and appearance in public become vital, "and any dress or action which might attract the attention of other people and thus threaten the husband's sexual exclusivity is severely punished."[30] Naturally, there are inter- and intra-societal variations as to what is deemed "proper," "threatening," and so forth. In addition, not only married but also unmarried women are affected by behavioral and dress restrictions. This does not negate Kessler's argument, since the purpose of premarital restrictions is to preserve the girl's virginity and thus the family's honor, the girl's economic value where bridewealth or brideprice are issues, and her future husband's exclusive right of sexual access. So important are these factors that hymen restoration is reported to occur in the Middle East (and probably other areas), particularly in those places where many of the traditional barriers to nonmarital sex, such as restricted movement outside the home, have been modified but where virginity remains essential evidence of "worth" upon a woman's first marriage.[31] Widows and divorcees are similarly subject to restrictions on behavior and dress, making it clear that virginity is not the issue so much as legitimate (i.e. marital) sexual behavior by women to

ensure their reproductive value in society.

Sexual violation of a woman is in fact widely regarded as trespass against a man's property in honor bound societies. Even in the extreme case of forceable rape, society's concern is frequently not with the woman's physical and emotional wounds from the attack but rather with the violation of someone else's property and rights: the honor, and in some societies potential brideprice or bridewealth of the woman's natal family, and/or the honor and exclusive sexual access of the husband. Only this exclusivity of sexual access can guarentee a man biological paternity of the children in his household, and this surety takes on special importance in societies where inheritance is patrilineal. As a result, a rape victim may suffer not only as the target of a very personal physical assault, but subsequently as the instrument by which her kin have been dishonored. Indeed, in many societies the lack of volition on the part of the woman is minimized or ignored, the consequences of the rape in terms of family honor having far greater import socially. Not only has the rapist committed an attack on the honor of the woman's family, but the woman herself has in a sense violated that honor with a sort of aggression through vulnerability. Thus *her* offense is punished as well as that of the rapist, a case *par excellence* of blaming the victim.

Sexual affront is, of course, but one mode of physical behavior by means of which a person's honor may be assaulted. Any physical affront by its very nature suggests an assault on honor as it intrudes upon the "ideal sphere" surrounding the individual's honor.[32] Dishonorable intentions perceived by the victim, even without specific

action, may at times be sufficient to bring about a threat of shame because, as Pitt-Rivers remarks, "the essence of an affront is that another should dare to affront one. Therefore, when apologies are offered they normally take the form of a denial of the intention to cause offense."[33] Such denial is not always enough to eradicate shame, however, and honor frequently cannot be restored without revenge or reparation in some form.

In Arab-Muslim culture, honor is the essential measure of the man. Many of the ideals of honorable behavior are ultimately tied to such an ideal among the pre-Islāmic Bedouins, although they are also similar to manifestations of the honor code in other areas of the globe. As we shall see, the fundamentals of the honor/shame continuum as proposed in this cross-cultural summary hold true for the Arab World.

## Honor in Arab Culture

Honor in Arab culture is an ideal based on a multitude of considerations ranging from general ethical principles regarding individual behavior to rigid rules of conduct affecting all members of kinship groups. A number of linguistic terms are used to signify honor, and subtle variations in meaning and connotation inhere in them. The most important terms to understand, however, are *sharaf* and *ʿird* and their negative counterparts, *ʿayb* and *ʿār*. *Sharaf* designates a general type of honor pertaining to individuals and groups; in practice, personal and group *sharaf* are inseparable as one invariably affects the other. Similarly, *ʿayb* indicates a general type of shame resulting from any

number of possible breaches of acceptable (honorable) behavior. *ʿIrḍ*, on the other hand, although sometimes used in the sense of general honor, more often signifies a special class of honor embodied in and controlled by a man's female relatives, or more specifically, their sexual conduct and status. *ʿĀr* is dishonor resulting primarily from sexual misbehavior, that is, lack of chastity, by women. That both varieties of honor are highly valued by the culture is detailed in both ethnographic literature and in folklore.

## A Man of Honor

A man of honor, that is, who has *sharaf*, says Abou-Zeid in specific reference to Egyptian Bedouins, is one who is honest in personal dealings and contacts, keeps promises and is true to his word, revolts against injustices and "declines to comply with any form of oppression," is ever ready to defend his own interests and those of his kith and kin,[34] and is generous and hospitable. Beyond the performance of such deeds, tha man with *sharaf* is the one who, "the community...believes, has performed such acts and believes in the glory of these acts."[35] Shame is ascribed to "those who fail to observe the rules of good manners in general: the treacherous, the spiteful and the unfaithful to both their spouses and their friends."[36] A distinction is recognized between individualistic and communal connotations of honor and shame and has far-reaching effects even though an individual's behavior affects the prestige of his or her kin-group and the individual in turn acquires much of his or her social standing from kinship.[37]

Kinship is defined in terms of family, clan, or tribal affiliation. It is the most important component of Middle Eastern social organization. The average Middle Easterner is, according to John Gulick, educated for social integration and family obedience, not independence; by the same token, Abou-Zeid points out that kinship groups provide mutual protection in the event of financial, medical, or social crisis, and obligations to the group are often so keenly felt that "these group functions can remain important despite the presence of conflicting personal feelings among the kinsmen involved."[38]

Although certainly there are variations among Arabs regarding the size and extent of the kinship groups in which they are involved, there appear to be no constant or predictable differences between urban and rural people in this regard. Gulick asserts that, in spite of the stereotypical continuum which places the nomads with their large, corporate tribes at one end and urbanites with only their nuclear families at the other, there is no substantial evidence to support this image. Nevertheless, it appears that all of the above-mentioned kinship organizational patterns can be found in Middle Eastern villages and that probably all, including tribal groups, occur in cities as well. Furthermore, tribal alliances can serve to unite city dwellers and rural peoples.[39]

A number of generalities concerning Middle Eastern families have been proposed by Patai.[40] Although it must be remembered that there are numerous exceptions to these characteristic traits, they are useful for gaining an understanding of the fundamentals of Middle Eastern social structure.

Families, says Patai, tend traditionally to be large and extended. Occasionally, the household consists of an elderly man and his wife (or wives), his unmarried daughters, his married and unmarried sons and their wives and children. Such a family functions as an economic unit if the members live in the same house.[41] Gulick points out, however, that such an extended family household is unusual in fact, and that there are "indications that many Middle Easterners dislike the extended family as a household arrangement."[42] The family bond remains, and often there are continuous visitations between households, but separate households are in fact frequently maintained, and the nuclear or conjugal family is becoming ever more common.[43] Mark Kennedy indicates that recent research on Egyptian families, both rural and urban, has turned up an increase in nucleation of families in the middle and upper classes.[44]

Large families, which carry the connotations of coherence and strength -- hence prestige and honor -- have traditionally been preferred. Thus, despite high infant and child mortality rates, sizeable families are still common in the Middle East, although there are indications that young educated parents in some countries are electing to have fewer children. Potency and fertility are emphasized. Barren women are thought to be cursed by God and often to possess the evil eye,[45] and impotence in men may also be attributed to supernatural causes.[46]

Middle Eastern families are patrilineal,[47] and tend traditionally to be patrilocal and patriarchal. Endogamy within a relatively narrow kinship circle is widely considered ideal, and each of the

three ecological groups (nomadic pastoralists, farmers and urbanites) tend also to be endogamous. General opinion disapproves of cross-marriages between nomads, villagers and townspeople, and in practice such alliances are rare. Occasionally Middle Eastern families are polygynous, although the extent of the practice has been greatly exaggerated by Western observers and writers. Although lawful for Muslims and Oriental Jews (who together comprise 90% of the population[48]), polygyny has always been and is in recent years increasingly rare.

Changes have been and are occurring in Middle Eastern families due to a variety of influences. Modernization and legislation setting minimum marriage ages have had some effect, and although parents' desires still figure largely in decisions concerning marriage and many marriages are still arranged, more and more young people are choosing their own spouses.[49] Perhaps the most influential force, not only on the family but on Arab society at large, has been the emancipation of women through education and increased liberty to move outside the home,[50] partly through shifts in attitudes and partly in response to economic pressures. Such pressures have had a profound effect on the patriarchal structure of many families, particularly in the less wealthy, more over-populated countries.[51] In Egypt, for instance, Barbara Ibrahim indicates that collective negotiation within the family is replacing patriarchal authority in such matters as decisions on women working outside the home[52] and "such processes as forming a new and different linkage between families...and the wider society.[53]

In spite of the extensive changes of recent years, the basic principles upon which the family and tribe are built remain in varying

degrees. Fundamental to the tribal ethos and the family structure is the principle of collective responsibility within the kinship circle and relative to outsiders. It is associated with group cohesion[54] and is expressed in such institutions as the blood feud and raiding, the laws of hospitality and sanctuary, and the notions of honor, shame and nobility. These qualities are most clearly manifested by the nomadic Bedouins, but are maintained, more or less, at all levels of society.[55] El-Shamy, for instance, observes that "Traditionary groups, especially in southern Egypt and in desert communities, glorify 'killings' for sexual honor and blood vendetta, and share with the 'killer' the consequences of his or her act...."[56] Such sharing of consequences is assumed by the groups to which the wronged party and the aggressor belong, and means that any member of the aggressor's group is potentially liable for a wrongful act by another member of the group. Consequently, while groups which lay culpability on the individual for moral and/or legal transgressions extend responsibility to other members of his or her group only in very general terms,[57] groups which base responsibilities on collective principles may extract payment from other group members if the primary offender (i.e. the perpetrator) is not accessible. Thus if person A of group X kills person B of group Y, person B's brother (or other kinsman) may subsequently kill A's brother (or other relative) if A cannot be reached.[58]

The *sharaf* of a kinship group, e.g. a clan, is not an independent entity in Arab society. Rather it exists in both diachronic and synchronic relation to the honor of significant others. Since *sharaf* is cumulative and hereditary, family honor can be viewed on one level

as the sum of honor derived from acts accomplished by its ascendents and maintained in what Meeker calls the group's "sacred historiography [which] provides a historical significance by which men's actions are measured."[59] Furthermore, group *sharaf* is relative, denoting the position of the group *vis-à-vis* other groups.[60] Significant actions are not sufficient by themselves to maintain honor; as with acts involving individual honor, they must be recognized by the community.

Abou-Zeid discusses passive and active acquisition of honor among the Awlād ᶜAlī clans of the Egyptian-Libyan frontier area. These nomads, who in many ways typify Bedouins throughout the Arab World, consider honor (*sharaf*) in the broad sense of the word to be a matter of complying with traditional behavior patterns; this is a passive means of acquiring, or more properly of not losing, honor. On a more active level, honor requires "achievement of superiority and distinction" through realization of social ideals which contribute to the prestige and reputation, hence increased honor, of both the individual and the group; such achievement is in many cases affected by the behavior of others, as in raiding or taking revenge.[61]

## Honorable Behavior

Behavior takes on varying degrees of honor and shame, determined in part by the nature of the act itself and in part by its effects. Some actions result in shame for the individual only, while others may disgrace the kin group as well. For example, if a woman were to appear in public inappropriately clothed, as determined by both the general social milieu and her immediate social environment, this would normally

be judged an *ʿayb* action. Such misbehavior seldom requires severe intervention by society at large and any response is usually aimed at the woman herself and takes a relatively mild form, such as blame, mockery, ridicule or scolding. *ʿĀr* actions such as adultery, in contrast, bring shame on the family as well as on the individual. Because different groups of people are involved and the action is perceived to threaten social equilibrium, retributions are more severe than for *ʿayb* behavior and in some places may even take the extreme form of capital punishment.[62]

Just as different actions have different implications, so may the same action have alternate meanings -- honorable or shameful -- according to the context. For example, the Bedouins admire and encourage attacks on camps of strong and powerful clans, but Abou-Zeid notes that it is regarded as shameful to violate the rights of the poor and weak.[63] Yet other violations of social acceptability are not open to contextual interpretations. For instance, sexual infidelity by a woman, whether by choice or by force, is invariably an *ʿār* action and results in family shame and severe consequences for both of the parties involved.

Shame may also be incurred, ironically, by excessive displays of behavior which is normally considered honorable. Although skill and bravery against enemies are honorable qualities, for example, unchecked raiding and warfare, or such actions against weaker clans, are held to be shameful rashness. Even the revered qualities of generosity and hospitality may, when carried to excess and perceived as ostentation, bring disgrace. Abou-Zeid explains that it is difficult to determine "where exactly lies the line at which honourable deeds may find their

sense reversed and become a source of disgrace, but the line does exist and society knows how to evaluate the same action in different contexts."[64]

## The Function of Honor

What is the function of honor as a social ideal in Arab culture? Abou-Zeid suggests that in the segmentary society of the Bedouins of the Western Desert, who have only recently submitted to strong government control, "honour has played and still plays, a most vital role in the field of social control, besides providing an effective code of morality."[65] The strict defense of honor acts as insurance against misconduct and unjustified aggression. Thus he writes:

> The fear that the offended group will retaliate with violence is an effective check on the behaviour of individuals and groups alike. On the other hand, the shame which strikes an aggressor or culprit and the consequent humiliation he brings on himself as well as on his kin-group is an additional factor in regulating social behavior.[66]

As is typical of such functionalist explanations, Abou-Zeid's analysis fails to take into account the fact that dishonorable behavior *does* occur in honor bound Arab societies and that there are dysfunctional aspects of the honor/shame complex. The constant concern with the acquisition and protection of honor, and the accompanying paranoia which pervades Arab society create an atmosphere of secrecy and suspicion. It can be argued in addition that this atmosphere does not so much affect behavior itself as the openness of that behavior; few people will deny that adultery, for example, occurs in Arab societies, but it is carried on with the utmost care and stealth, literally veiled from

society's eyes. No doubt the awareness that such hidden violations occur reinforces the idea that social conventions such as segregation of the sexes are necessary to prevent rampant sexual indulgences from disrupting society. For if there is so much interest and participation in illicit sex in spite of the precautions taken by society, so the argument goes, it could only be worse were the sanctions dropped. Yet folk opinion does recognize that prohibition has its own allure; as the proverb says, "Whatever is prohibited becomes desirable."[67]

Meeker suggests that honor (*sharaf*) functions not so much as a control mechanism as an interpretive device; it is "a way of attributing meaning to events, their participants, and their context."[68] This meaning is assigned in reference to the normative view of ideal culture which some members of society would perhaps like to establish as inviolable prescriptions for behavior. The error that Abou-Zeid makes is in accepting the verbalized ideal view that shameful behavior is precluded due to fear of shame or of retaliation from a dishonored opponent. Such is not in reality the case; if it were no one would ever be shamed or become the target of an act of revenge because all would act honorably. As Meeker argues, what the ideal code does in real culture is provide a method for classifying and coping with threatening behavior when it becomes public knowledge and, conversely, for classifying and rewarding actions which support the ideals of the culture. On the individual level it provides a standard by which self-evaluation can be made. In the next chapter we shall examine what proverbs have to say concerning honor and shame as standards and classes of behavior and condition.

NOTES

[1]See, for example: Peter C. Dodd, "Family Honor and the Forces of Change in Arab Society," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 4 (1973): 40-54; Gideon M. Kressel, "Sorocide/Filiacide: Homocide for Family Honor," *Current Anthropology* 22 (1981): 141-152; Michael E. Meeker, "Meaning and Society in the Near East: Examples from the Black Sea Turks and the Levantine Arabs," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 7 (1976): 242-270, 383-422; J.G. Peristiany, ed., *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).

[2]J.G. Peristiany, "Honour and Shame in a Cypriot Highland Village," ed. Peristiany, *Honour*, 173.

[3]J.G. Peristiany, "Introduction," ed. Peristiany, *Honour*, 17.

[4]*Ibid.*, 10.

[5]*Ibid.*, 17-18.

[6]*Ibid.*, 10.

[7]Jane Scheneider, "Of Vigilence and Virgins: Honor, Shame and Access to Resources in Mediterranean Societies," *Ethnology* 10 (1971): 17.

[8]*Ibid.*

[9]See, for example: Ahmed Abou-Zeid, "Honour and Shame Among the Bedouins of Egypt," ed. Peristiany, *Honour*, 41-53; Michael E. Meeker, *Literature and Violence in North Arabia* (Cambridge: University Press, 1965).

[10]See, for example: Kressel, "Sorocide," 141-152; Abner Cohen, *Arab Border Village in Israel* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1965).

[11]Julian Pitt-Rivers, "Honour and Social Status," ed. Peristiany, *Honour*, 22.

[12]*Ibid.*

[13]*Ibid.*

[14]*Ibid.*

[15]*Ibid.*, 21.

[16]*Ibid.*

[17]Peristiany, "Introduction," 11.

[18]*Ibid.*

[19]*Ibid.*

[20]Pierre Bourdieu, "The Sentiment of Honour in Kabyle Society," trans. Philip Sherrard, ed. Peristiany, *Honour*, 38.

[21]Pitt-Rivers, "Honour," 38.

[22]*Ibid.*, 39.

[23]*Ibid.*

[24]J. Davis, *People of the Mediterranean: An Essay in Comparative Social Anthropology* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), 78.

[25]*Ibid.*, 77.

[26]Bourdieu, "Sentiment," 212.

[27]Meeker, "Meaning," 242-270, 383-422.

[28]Davis, *People*, 77.

[29]Evelyn S. Kessler, *Women: An Anthrpological View* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976), 45.

[30]*Ibid.*

[31]I have heard the subject of surgical restoration of hymens discussed by people from throughout the Arab World as well as Iran and Turkey. There are numerous anecdotes and jokes on the subject. For instance, there is the story of the young lady who had a series of lovers, but upon terminating each affair she went to the doctor to have her virginity restored. On her third visit to the doctor, he suggested that he simply install a zipper. Cf. Hasan M. El-Shamy, *Folktales of Egypt* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 231-232.

[32]Pitt-Rivers, "Honour," 25.

[33]*Ibid.*, 26.

[34]Abou-Zeid, "Honour," 245.

[35]Meeker, "Meaning," 251.

[36]Abou-Zeid, "Honour," 245.

[37]*Ibid.*, 247.

[38]*Ibid.*

[39]*Ibid.*

[40]Raphael Patai, "Culture Areas of the Contemporary Middle East," *Golden River to Golden Road: Society, Culture and Change in the Middle East* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1962), 84-114.

[41]*Ibid.*

[42]Gulick, "Village," 131.

[43]*Ibid.*; cf. Mark C. Kennedy, "Middle Eastern Families in Transitional Societies: An Editorial Essay," *International Journal of Sociology of the Family* 11 (1981): 153 . This essay introduces a special issue of the journal on "Middle Eastern Families."

[44]Kennedy, "Middle Eastern," 153.

[45]See, for example: Daisy Hilse Dwyer, *Images and Self-Images: Male and Female in Morocco* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978); Edward A. Westermarck, *Ritual and Belief in Morocco* (London: Macmillan and Company, 1926).

[46]See, for example: Vincent Crapanzano, "The Hamadsha," ed. Nikki Keddie, *Scholars, Saints and Sufis* (Berkeley: University of California, 1972), 327-348.

[47]Abou-Zeid, "Honour," 246-247.

[48]Raphael Patai, "The Family: Basic Characteristics," in *Golden River*, 90.

[49]See Hasan El-Shamy, "The Brother-Sister Syndrome in Arab Family Life, Socio-Cultural Factors in Arab Psychiatry: A Critical Review," *International Journal of Sociology of the Family* 11 (1981): 318.

[50]Abou-Zeid, "Honour," 246.

[51]Kennedy, "Middle Eastern," 158.

[52]See Barbara Lethem Ibrahim, "Family Strategies: A Perspective on Women's Entry into the Labour Force in Egypt," *International Journal of Sociology of the Family* 11 (1981): 235-249; Andrea B. Rugh, "Bulaq's Families," *International Journal of Sociology of the Family* 11 (1981): 251-284.

[53]Ibrahim, "Family," 237.

[54]See El-Shamy, "Brother-Sister," 318.

[55]Abou-Zeid, "Honour," 259.

[56]El-Shamy, Brother-Sister," 318.

[57]For example, in American society parents may be held legally responsible for actions by minor children, but upon their majority the children assume full legal responsibility and relatives are only loosely held responsible for people's actions.

[58]See, for example, Emrys Peters, "Some Structural Aspects of the Feud Among the Camel-Herding Bedouin of Cyrenaica," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 37 (1967): 261-282.

[59]Meeker, "Meaning," 246.

[60]*Ibid.*, 250.

[61]Abou-Zeid, "Honour," 258.

[62]*Ibid.*, 246-247.

[63]*Ibid.*, 246.

[64]*Ibid.*, 259.

[65]*Ibid.*

[66]*Ibid.*

[67]*kulli mamnūᶜ marghūb.* Jan Gabril, *Lebanon: Proverbs and Maxims* (Beirut: Dar al-Kitāb al-Lubnānī, 1972), #324.

[68]Meeker, "Meaning," 252.

CHAPTER V

# HONOR AND SHAME IN ARABIC PROVERBS

As we have seen in the previous chapter, honor is an essential facet of traditional Arab culture, linked closely to a number of other cultural elements: emphasis on generosity and hospitality; modesty and chastity, particularly of women; solidarity of kinship groups; various manifestations of courage and valor, such as protection of neighbors and clients and the willingness to take revenge when necessary. We now move to the relationship between proverbs and the ethnographic data on honor and shame.

## The Proverbial Man of Honor

The word *murū'a* translates roughly as "ideal manhood," a concept inextricably mixed with generalized honor (*sharaf*) in the Arab ethos. Among the components of *murū'a* is a sense of honor, as well as masculinity, valor, chivalry and generosity. The vital criteria for evaluating a man in the proverbs examined here include a number of intertwined attributes summarized thus: "A young man's beauty (*lit.* sweetness) in life [is from] three [things]: manliness (*murū'a*), chivalry (*futūwwa*) and generosity (*sakhā'*)"[2].[1] These attributes -- manliness, chivalry, generosity -- are associated with generalized honor; the overlapping of connotation in the terminology creates a circular system of evaluation, for a man must have honor as one portion

of manliness, while at the same time manliness is an ingredient of honor: one does not exist without the other. The proverb "The sweetness [of a person] is the beauty of [his] disposition"[3] is in the same vein if we take "disposition" (*tabīʿa*) to mean the sum total of a person's character traits. The proverbs in fact carry this philosophy a step further; not only is inner beauty or sweetness said to be determined by the complex components of moral character, masculinity, and so forth, but physical qualities are also affected by them: "The beauty of the face [derives] from the beauty of character"[4] (see Table 3).

*Sharaf*, the concept of generalized honor, derives from a root implying "highness" in physical position as well as social status. It is built up through both individual and group efforts, and is an indispensible aspect of social potency. Proverbs vary in the terminology they use to indicate *sharaf*, but the various lexical tems used interlace and imply different facets of generalized honor which provide advantages for the person who possesses them. For example, in the saying "The shadow of a noble man (*al-karīm*) is wide"[5], being *karīm* includes

TABLE 3

QUALITIES AND CONSEQUENCES ASSOCIATED WITH HONOR AND SHAME IN THE PROVERBS

| +honor/-shame | -honor/+shame |
|---|---|
| beauty [2,3]<br>influence, power [5]<br>invulnerability [6]<br>freedom [15,16] | lack of religion [25]<br>decapitation [1]<br>disaster, ruin [21,22] |

being decent, generous and honorable. Having *sharaf* (or lacking *ʿayb*, then, according to the proverbs, renders a person powerful or influential [5], physically attractive [4] and consequently free to act as he wishes: "[He] who does not feel ashamed does what he wants"[15] and "If you are unashamed then you can do what you like"[16]. Furthermore, adverse circumstances do not detract from honor, for "An honorable man (*al-hurr*) is honorable even though harm befalls him"[6].

Because honor (both *sharaf*, general honor, and *ʿayb*, sexual honor) is an essential component of manhood in Arab culture, the concensus, in proverbs and ethnographic descriptions, is that virtually anything is more desirable than dishonor or shame. For instance, "Poverty rather than disgrace (*ʿayb*)"[7] and "[I would live on] ten [pieces of] celery rather than degrade myself"[14] give preference to abject poverty over shame. Similarly, futile but honorable struggle may be favorable to success without honor: "Better to lose without disgrace than to win with humiliation"[8]. Death with honor is likened to a joyous celebration and life with dishonor to a tragic one: "The death of a youth in his glory (*ʿizz*) is like his wedding, and his life in disgrace (*dhull*) is like his funeral"[9]. *ʿIzz* here connotes strength and honor, while *dhull* implies insignificance, submissiveness and shame. Likewise, in "Die with honor (*sharaf*) rather than live disgraced (*dhalīl*)"[11], *dhalil* suggests a disgrace coupled with docility, humility, servility, obsequiousness, cowering and cringing, none of which is compatible with the ideal of manhood in Arab culture. Death [12,13] and Hellfire [10] are invariably conveyed as more attractive than living with shame. The proverbs suggest nothing better than honor.

*Sharaf* (general honor) is not static but rather is subject to increase or deterioration relative to individual or kin-group action[2] (see pp. 127-132). A powerful and pervasive fear permeates Arab society because *sharaf* is, as it were, ever under siege; the ramparts of honor must continuously be defended, for it is said that "[He] who has not died, his [potential for] shame (*ʿayb*) is not past"[29]. What kinds of actions bring dishonor? Proverbs mention a number of possibilities. The stoicness of the nomad is reflected in the saying "Complaint to other than God is humiliation (*madhalla*)[17]. Subservience also brings disgrace: "Nothing humiliates the soul but one soul dominating another" [28] is a reminder of the independent, intra-group egalitarianism of the Bedouin. Error also opens the way for shame, but "He who never errs is never disgraced"[26]; the possibility of such perfection is denied in another saying: "To each scholar [there is] an error, and to every charger a false step"[27]. Action and actor are equated in the proverb "Shame (*ʿayb*) to him who does shameful [things]"[18]. In other words, one is as one does.

However, a man must not brag of his good deeds. The most significant catalyst for dishonor cited in the proverbs is self-praise or lack of modesty; it is said that "No one praises himself but Satan" [20]. Lack of modesty is associated with negative repercussions: "If modesty becomes rare, disaster prevails"[21] and "If modesty departs, ruin arrives"[22]. Modesty is a vital concept in Arab culture, sometimes spoken of as "the water of modesty" (*mā al-ḥayā'*).[3] Hence of one who is over bold or forward it is said that "The roots of modesty have dried up in him"[24] or "He has plucked out the roots of modesty"[23].

The need for modesty does not, however, negate the necessity for self-respect; the latter is an essential component of identity: "Honor yourself to find yourself"[34]. Furthermore, lack of self-respect opens the way for public debasement, which is, after all, one of the most significant aspects of shame. Proverbs indicate that people will treat a person as he treats himself: "He who enhances himself, the people will enhance, and he who makes himself dung [they] will defame"[33], "He who lets himself become chaff, the cows will eat"[30; cf. 31,32], and "He who does not respect himself, people will not respect"[35]. Another related proverb says: "He said: 'Shame on him who backbites people.' The other said: 'Shame on him who lets people backbite him!" [50].

The consequences and implications of dishonor and popular opinion are serious since honor can be maintained only when one is not vulnerable to public criticism; otherwise, one is exposed to shame.[4] The comment that "He who has no honor has no religion"[25] is a grave accusation in a culture in which religion is thoroughly enmeshed with all aspects of life, there being no clear distinction between secular and religious concerns. Another proverb states that "It is lawful (*halāl*) to decapitate him who is not moved by manliness (*murūwa*)"[1]. Because *murūwa* incorporates honor and other highly-valued attributes and because *halāl* suggests not only religious permissability but religious, and therefore ethical, preferability, this statement indicates that death is better than dishonor not just to the individual concerned but to society at large. And, although a man may have varying degrees of *sharaf*, in the final analysis society judges on an all or nothing

premise, for it is said that "At the examination, a man is either honored or disgraced"[19].

## Generosity and Hospitality

O Guest of ours, though you have come, though you have visited us,
and though you have honored our dwellings:
We verily are the real guests, and you are the Lord of this house.[5]

Among Arabs, and especially among Bedouins, a guest is a sacred trust. The traditional laws of hospitality and generosity are highly esteemed, dictating that a guest must "be entertained, fed and looked after in a fitting manner, and to the best of the host's power."[6] Generosity is regarded as a great panacea, potent enough even to restore lost honor: "Generosity covers shame"[37] and "There is no shame that generosity cannot hide"[38]. As might be expected, another proverb states that "Stinginess exposes [one's] shame and cuts love from hearts"[39]. The ideal of the generous host is virtually universal among Arabs, both nomadic and sedentary. A guest who has been fed or served coffee is linked to his host by a "salt bond" (*milha*) which gives the guest the right to expect food, shelter, and protection from his host for a period of three days. During this time the guest also incurs a responsibility to protect his host from the guest's tribe. Violation of the trust of guesthood is dishonorable: "Shame on him who drinks from a well and [then] throws a stone into it"[47], although the possibility of such an infraction is recognized: "Protect yourself against the eveil of him to whom you have been kind"[46].

Beyond this simple care-taking of guests, hospitality involves the complex concept of the home as *haram*, that, is inviolable. Among Bedouins, the concept of *haram* applies to strangers staying in the tent as well as to the original members of the household (*bayt*). An attack on such a person is regarded as an assault on members of the *bayt* and an insult to their honor. A number of rules of conduct pertain among Bedouins because of the responsibility for protecting guests and avenging their injuries; particularly important are the rights of refuge (*dukhalā'*), face (*wajh*), and neighborhood (*qasīr*?).

The right of refuge involves protection granted on request. Any person, even one being sought for a crime against the family of the house he enters, may ask for and expect to receive refuge for periods ranging from three days among the Shammar, Dhafir, Harb and ᶜAwāzim tribes to twelve months among the Mutayr, Qahtān, and ᶜUtayba. During that time, the owner of the tent is required to grant sanctuary from pursuers, from whom the fugitive enjoys complete immunity while in the tent as an attack on him would be an assault on the honor of the *bayt* (household). In addition to refuge, the host must provide food and clothing for his "guest," attempt to negotiate a reconciliation with the pursuers and, should that fail, see the fugitive safely to his desired destination upon expiration of the refuge period.[8] A refusal to grant refuge when asked "would imply weakness, would blacken one's honor, and the man who refuses would be derided at all camp fires for his lack of manly courage."[9]

The idea of granting refuge to the murderer of a close relative is a common theme in Middle Eastern folklore,[10] and personifies the

epitome of honorable conduct, for, as Abou-Zeid writes, "the highest grade of honour...is attained when the ideal can only be realized at the expense of the performer himself."[11] In the event that a man grants sanctuary to his own enemy, he "gives practical proof that in his consideration honour is larger than life itself."[12]

The right of face provides immunity for an enemy who surrenders during a war or raid; Abou-Zeid compares this right to that of refuge: "By analogy a culprit, especially a murderer whose blood and life are sought in retaliation, can go to the *bayt* (household) of his own victim and claim immunity."[13] Thus *dukhalā'* and *wajh* tend to merge, for upon request of the fugitive for *wajh*, the people of the *bayt* are bound to accept him as a *protegé*, granting immunity and attempting to convince other members of the lineage to accept blood money in place of blood. Failure to adhere to the rules of *wajh* bring shame to the whole lineage; the reward to the *bayt* (household) for compliance is "the sublime honour they acquire by behaving in such an honourable way."[14] Dickson reports that being under the safe-conduct of So-and-So (*bi wajh fulān*) was in fact quite common in the desert of Kuwait in the fifties.[15] Perhaps the proverbs which suggest that excessive generosity is foolishness [44] and "brings in a dirty guest"[46] are sour reactions to social obligations which demand generosity even at the host's extreme discomfiture because of conflicting points of honor, i.e. the demand for hospitality and the demand for revenge.

That the principles of the *haram* (inviolable home) extend beyond the boundaries of the tent is shown in the right of neighborhood. There is some disagreement in the literature as to who the tent neigh-

bors are likely to be; Abou-Zeid describes them as "strangers from other clans who come to live near a certain *bayt* in tribal areas not their own,"[16] while Dickson maintains that they normally consist of the *banu ᶜamm* (paternal relatives) and *akhwāl* (maternal relatives), who camp together for mutual protection; Abou-Zeid asserts that the rules of neighborhood apply also when members of a strange tribe ask to camp near someone's tent, become his neighbor, and migrate with his tribe.[17] If the request is granted, which is usual, then members of the *bayt* (household) are required to provide hospitality and protection, especially of women in the neighbor's tent; the tent neighbor must in turn defend his benefactors from all attackers, even members of his own tribe. The patron *bayt* must provide all that the neighbor requires to make a living, sometimes including an allotment of land for cultivation and allowing them access to the *bayt*'s pasture land and wells. Complex mutual obligations in the event of war between the tribes of the original *bayt* and the neighbor are enforced by convention.[18]

The granting of the request to become a tent neighbor lends prestige to the *bayt*, and also provides its members with "potential clients and political allies in tribal disputes."[19] Large numbers of clients who may eventually be incorporated into a lineage help to enhance its honor, because the pivot points for the values of *sharaf* and *ᶜār* among the Bedouins are kinship and livestock; both contribute to a man's political power and social security, and he therefore protects both with equal zeal.[20] For the settled Arab, kinship and possessions assume much the same importance, for family helps to provide *wasta* (connections or "pull") and wealth gives power.

The penalties for violating the rights of refuge, face or neighborhood are severe, as these rights provide a measure of security in the hostile context of the desert. Anyone who purposely violates the custom is forced to pay a heavy fine, known as "honor money."[21] The obligations of all three types of relationships are essentially those of the guest and host elaborated, for by sharing food or coffee, the "salt bond," with its mutual onbligations, is established.

The positive sociocultural valuation of extensively generous hospitality certainly reaches beyond the environs of the desert proper, as anyone who has been subjected to the deluge of soft drinks, tea, coffee, food, sweets, nuts, fruits and so on offered by an Arab host or hostess knows. It is not uncommon to hear of instances in which a guest was treated to a feast even though it might mean that the host's family go hungry. The philosophy behind this sort of behavior appears in four proverbs examined here, their themes being that "He who dishonors his possessions honors himself"[41; cf. 40,42,43].

Thus we see that the eleven proverbs here which deal with hospitality and generosity are, in their judgments, consistent both among themselves and with the ethnographic literature. Table 4 shows that generosity is invariably seen as a covering for shame and is associated with honor, although indiscriminate or excessive generosity can be foolish or even dangerous. Stinginess is, in contrast, regarded as shameful and hateful. None of the proverbs extol any virtues in thrift, which is consistent with ethnographic data and, based on subjective observation, with spending behavior in Arab countries.

TABLE 4

QUALITIES AND CONSEQUENCES ASSOCIATED WITH GENEROSITY AND STINGINESS IN THE PROVERBS

| Generosity | Excessive Generosity | Stinginess |
|---|---|---|
| cover for shame [37, 38]<br>honor [40,41,42,43] | foolish [44]<br>dangerous [45,46] | exposes shame [39]<br>removes love [37] |

## Revenge

One of the most important aspects of honor, particularly among nomadic and village Arabs, is the necessity to avenge offensive acts against oneself, one's lineage, or one's wife. Revenge (*tha'r*) is one of the active modes of realizing the social ideal of honor, and is also one obligation of the host to the guest under the rules of refuge, face and neighborhood.

In spite of its importance in traditional Arab culture, few of the proverbs located for this study concern revenge. Yet the attitude toward revenge is positive in the few that were found; most clearly stated, the idea is that "To take revenge is no dishonor"[52]. Further, the notion of patron/client relationship is cited in the saying, "Dishonored is he who has no insolent defender (*safīh*)"[51]. Burckhardt explains that *safīh* refers in Egypt to people who fight other people's verbal battles for them.[22] By the same token, a person who has no kin group or patron lacks the resources to defend his honor and is therefore subject to losing it.

Although the ideal of vengence is a literal "eye for an eye," one-upmanship is extolled in the sayings "He who steps on your foot, step on his neck"[53] and "He who spits on your palm, spit on his beard"[54]. The implementation of this rule could, of course, prolong tensions rather than equalize relations, certainly a social dysfunction of "honorable" behavior. In fact, blood feuds do sometimes continue over long periods of time, involving multiple generations of the lineages. This is possible in part because, due to group responsibility for an individual's actions, any member of the lineage may be the target of a victim's revenge. This potentiality, coupled with the need to maintain family honor, is a powerful incentive for the group to police its own members' behavior, although it does not do away with violations. Prolonged vendettas also result partially from the widespread notion that patience is indeed a virtue when plotting revenge, and it may be necessary to wait a long time, as evinced in the proverb "The Bedouin took revenge after forty years and said: I am earlier (than I expected)."[23]

Some acts of revenge are responses to physical assaults, such as murder, injury or rape, but many are launched in retaliation for attacks on a man's or a group's honor. When, for instance, a band of Bedouins raids a hostile camp or group, they bolster their own honor not only by raiding their enemy's camp and displaying manly courage, but also because by so doing the attackers sully the honor of their foe. In turn, should the raiders be unsuccessful, they are shamed "regardless of the courage or the military ability they may have shown."[24] Because honor is gained in such cases at the expense of other people,

it is expected that the wronged (shamed) party will attempt to avenge himself as soon as feasible, even if only after forty years.

It is surprising that despite the centrality of revenge in Arab culture, particularly among nomadic and very traditional elements of society, only five proverbs, or 4.4% of the proverbs dealing with honor and shame and closely related subjects, concern revenge. Possibly because of the apparent cultural concensus regarding the desirability of taking revenge when wronged, it is not a topic requiring rhetorical support through proverbial opinion; revenge is not a subject to be debated. In addition, it may be that other genres of folklore deal with revenge more visibly.

## Families and Honor

The concept of family honor is one of the most important issues in traditional Arab society. Survival, both physical and social, depends upon having kinsmen, for they help in times of danger, and share responsibility for the behavior of all family members.[25] As has been discussed, the collective status, honor and prestige of the group is affected by the behavior of its separate members just as the individual's standing is determined in large part by that of the kinship group. Musil succinctly describes, in terms relevant to traditional Arabs generally, the importance of kin to the Rwaylī Bedouin: the family of the Rwaylī "protects him from injustice and suffers for his guilt."[26]

Kinship affects the honor of the lineage or clan in a number of ways. The size of the lineage, that is the number of offspring, symbolizes sexual virility and masculinity, qualities which assume special

significance in contrast to the absolute chastity of females required by the culture. A large lineage also serves as a deterrent against aggression of any kind, including injustice and maltreatment, while at the same time providing a potent striking force which can be used in raids against hostile groups.[27]

Good deeds and right actions amplify the honor and prestige of the *bayt* (household) and subsequently of the lineage and clan. Shameful actions bring shame first to the actor and the *bayt*, then to the larger group.[28] The cumulative honor of the lineage or clan, derived from all its members' invidual acts, in turn affects the individuals' honor and prestige. The *bayt* is the central unit of social organization, "and although it derives much of its prestige and honour from the lineage or clan of which it forms a part, it contributes in turn to that honour (or reduces it) by the behaviour of its members."[29]

The five proverbs at hand[30] which concern the relationship between kinship on the one hand and honor or shame on the other clearly reiterate the dependence of the individual on his family for his honor. Three of the items state that honor derives from the family; the first of these, although metaphorical in that the subject is horses rather than people, is still quite straightforward in meaning: "The honor (*ʿizz*) of horses is in their stables"[101]. The other two define more by opposition. "He who throws off his clothes shall find himself naked" [103] alludes to the shameful vulnerability awaiting the person who leaves the protective kinship circle[31] for nakedness is a dishonorable state because it fully negates the modesty code which holds sway for both men and women in Arab society. So powerful is the modesty code,

Antoun observes that even offenses which have nothing to do with modesty, for instance assault or murder, are defined and described as breaches of modesty. In Jordan a man will, after such an offense, say "My honor is exposed (*ʿirdī imbaynī*)," using the term which is strongly associated with sexual honor (*ʿird*). The sexual implication of the insult to honor in such non-sexual contexts is made explicit in another expression also used in these cases: "He has screwed my honor (*nāk ʿirdī*)." Antoun goes on to say that "there seems to be a double meaning in the term *ʿird* which unites the body of the woman and the honor of the man."[32] This link is not surprising, for as noted earlier and discussed in more depth in the next section, a distinct and significant portion of a man's honor *is* dependent on the women to whom he is related. Furthermore, the insult to honor which is inherent in assault, fatal or not, consists of the desire to dominate on a physical level, which is analogous to the Arab cultural conception of the sex act as an act of male domination.[33] Physical assault is not unlike sexual intercourse as it involves as intrusion into the bodily integrity or "personal space" of another person without permission. Even in the case of willful non-marital sex on the part of a woman, the key to the assault on her kinsmen's honor is that she doesn't have the right to *be* willful about her sexuality. Thus any man who has sexual relations with her violates the honor of her male relatives by touching a "part" of the man without his permission, as does an assault on a male family member.

The third proverb which associates honor with kinship says "He who abandons his clan is humiliated (*dhall*)"[102]. Two alternate in-

terpretations of the proverb are possible, although both confirm the inseparability of honor and family. One possible message of the proverb is similar to the previous item in that a person who leaves his family behind will have no protection from humiliation. The alternative interpretation is that a person who fails to help his clan in time of need, or possibly who abandons them by committing an act detrimental to them, incurs shame as the result of dishonorable behavior.

The remaining two proverbs in this section indicate that families bestow shame on individuals, a rather unhappy view of kindred relationships. One item attributes a child's lack of honor to family or parents: "The shame of the son is from his family"[104]. Another ascribes responsibility for a group's dishonor to its leader, the patriarch: "The shame of the flock is from the shepherd"[105].

Proverbial opinion clearly concurs with ideal and real culture on the importance of family-individual ties. Although it cannot fairly be said that individuals and individuality are unimportant in Arab culture, it also cannot be denied that the fundamental identity of the individual is based on membership in groups, and the most immediate and significant of them is the kinship group. Most responsibilities and expectations revolve around families and involve reciprocity between the group and the individual, and the elements of honor and shame are among the most, if not the most, influential factors in the dynamics of individual-kingroup relations.

## Women and Honor

Men and women are, according to traditional Middle Eastern beliefs, of radically different natures, and although the two sexes are mutually dependent, theirs is a symbiosis often wrought with suspicion. Men are held to be legally and economically superior and dominant, yet are also thought to be vulnerable to women in many ways. Bound up with these notions are the social institutions of sexual segregation (practiced with more or less severity in different places) and clear-cut division of labor.

Sexuality of both men and women is stressed, but that of women is more feared because their sexual conduct is tied to the honor of their male relatives. Men are thus suspicious of women, and behave as though they believe that women have strong sexual impulses which they (the women) are too weak to control. Hence the harnessing of a woman's sexuality falls to her male kin. There is a conflict, of course, for even while men boast of their own virility, they must be on guard so as not to fall victim, through their wives, daughters and sisters, to the virility of other men.

Fear of sexual proclivities of females often leads to their early marriage, usually to a man of their parents' choice. The average marital age for girls is increasing, but romantic love on the one hand and marriage on the other are still largely separate institutions. Arabic literature and folklore are replete with courtship and romantic, often tragic, love, "but not between men and women who marry one another."[34] Dating as it is known in the West is very rare.

It has sometimes been claimed that nomadic and village women enjoy more freedom than do city women since they are frequently seen unveiled. However, sexual segregation in rural areas is clearly delineated, and "the participation of women in farming is due to dire necessity and is not an indication of any relaxation of the segregation principle."[35] Men's and women's areas of the nomadic tent are separated by a woven partition, and, as Gulick indicates, "the ideology of male superiority and female inferiority[36] is expressed as vociferously by the pastoral people as it is by other Middle Easterners."[37] Indeed, in places such as Kuwait it is primarily the Bedouin women who wear the *burqu*$^{c}$ and *būshīya* (face veils), while urban women, even those who wear the $^{c}$*abāyya*[38], go bare-faced. Although there are variations according to location, education, social class and religious orthodoxy, the basic differentiation of roles and expectations based on gender is still a fundamental element of Middle Eastern society.

In paternalistic societies like those of nomadic and sedentary Arabs, where men occupy the dominant social position in all aspects and activities of life, it is logical for the honor of the group to be determined largely by the behavior and achievements of men rather than women. In spite of this, Arab women can and do play an obvious role in the honor of their families and lineages in what Abou-Zeid calls "a unique and decisive way that cannot be ignored or minimized....the woman's own conduct in daily life bears heavily on the honour of her people."[39] She is linked conceptually with the sacred, the *haram*. The word *haram* can mean sacred, sanctuary or wife; the *harīm* (women's quarters and its occupants) of a home is *harām* (taboo) to men outside

the family. The *hurma* (respectable woman or wife) is thus inviolable and in that sense sacrosanct. She also possesses *sitr* (modesty) and is *mastūra* (chaste), terms which are related to the verb *satara*, to veil or conceal, and the noun *sutra*, a covering or screen. The connotation of these related meanings is clearly that a virtuous woman is protected or concealed, preferably through marriage as soon after menarch as possible. The notion of marriage as protection, literally as a covering, is illustrated in the following two proverbs: "Marriage is a covering"[87] and "A girl's covering is her marriage"[86]. What is she protected against? Antoun writes that "The unmentioned but assumed aggressor is the male who threatens her modesty."[40]

The term *ʿird* means honor and incorporates a number of elements: courage, honesty, truthfulness, vendetta, generosity, invulnerability of the abode, and, perhaps most importantly, chastity of female relatives.[41] In current usage, *ʿird* has become restricted, its meaning relating primarily to the virtue of a woman or even her beauty. In Egypt, reports B. Fares, the *ʿird* of a man depends in general on his wife's reputation and that of all his female relatives.[42] The individual's *ʿird* stems from that of his kinship group, which in turn rests upon the number of its members, the qualities of its poets and orators, its victories and independence,[43] and, most significantly, the reputation of its women. A family's or lineage's reputation based on its *sharaf* (general honor) and *ʿird* (sexual honor) reflects on all its members and affects their opportunities in life; honor of the wife's family is regarded, in proverbial opinion, as absolutely essential to the husband [84], more important than wealth [82] and a shield from gossip [83].

A significant amount of a man's honor rests in the women of his family. Pastoral and traditional agricultural societies value large families and this tends to focus attention on women, for they bring forth children, who (particularly the sons) give the family political and economic life. Schneider thus refers to women as a sort of natural resource as well as a repository of family and lineage honor.[44] The sanctity of the *bayt*, the tent or house and its occupants, is closely tied to the sanctity of women; both are *harām* (forbidden) to strangers and are to be guarded by men in order to guarentee blood paternity of offspring who will inherit patrilineally.

The investment of family honor in women, says Judith Stiehm, "creates a kind of bondage for men."[45] A large portion of their honor is controlled by female relatives, who are consequently subject to their male relatives' attempts to control them; a woman's reputation, and that of her family as well, depends, according to Abou-Zeid, "on her willingness to observe the rigid and severe rules governing sexual relationships and on her ability to preserve her chastity."[46] Male relatives tend to feel strong bonds of loyalty to one another but to be highly suspicious of other males and of females. The main contribution a woman can make to her lineage's honor is through the "passive role of preserving her chastity and purity."[47] The discovery that a woman has yielded to her sexual drives outside marriage is a devastating blow to family honor,[48] and women are therefore secluded and veiled in varying degrees to prevent their contact with strange men. So pervasive is the fear for honor as embodied in women that most of the proverbs give a decidedly negative and morbid view of female relatives,

particularly daughters and sisters. Girls are portrayed as a source of shame and vulnerability to enemies [88], of worry [89,92], and of futile efforts [94]. The daughter, because she may marry into another lineage and thus subject her own lienage's honor (*ʿird*) to another's stewardship, is a stranger [98] and the mother of strangers [99]. Although three proverbs regard daughters as a blessing [96,97] and preserver of the father's memory [95], the death of a daughter is pictured as fortunate [90,91]. Birth customs in traditional Arab societies support the proverbial attitude; baby boys are greeted by the midwife with the *zaghārīt* (trills of joy) and girls with silence and, occasionally, condolences to the father. This is not to say that Arab men do not love their daughters and sisters; nevertheless, the dominant attitude manifested in folklore is not a happy one.

Dodd summarizes the patterns of *ʿird* based on classical writings and contemporary ethnographies. *ʿIrd*, he explains, seems to be a secular as opposed to religious value; "The term does not appear in the Qurʿān, although both the term and the very high value attached to it existed among the pre-Islamic Arabs."[49] Islamic teachings on women and on male-female relations support *ʿird* indirectly, but it is not Islamic *per sé*, suggesting that the *ʿird* pattern can exist in non-Muslim societies. *ʿIrd* is a quality of both individuals and groups, but only the agnatic male relatives possess common *ʿird* or are responsible for enforcing the norms which repair damage to *ʿird*. One of the factors distinguishing the Arab husband-wife relationship from the same relationship in many Western societies is the fact that the agnatic (blood) tie is more important than the marriage tie in matters

concerned with safeguarding *ʿird*, although husbands are advised that "He who loves his wife should guard her"[85].

*ʿIrd* is simple to lose but extremely difficult to recover; writes Dodd, "It may be lost through a single act in a brief space of time, and may take generations to restore."[50] Some protection of family *ʿird* can be achieved through quick reaction against offense, and a family's *ʿird* can be increased or diminished by the conduct of its women and the demeanor of men towards its women.[51] Penalties for violations of *ʿird* can be severe, occasionally including even capital punishment, and are inflicted on women by the men of their own patrilineage, often at the urging of female relatives. Male transgressors may be punished as well, and when they are from outside the patrilineage their punishment raises the possibility of reprisals or feuds.[52]

The norms which surround *ʿird* include actions which are only remotely related to sex (loud speech, appearing in public places, bearing), and extend to situations in which challenges to *ʿird* might appear. For this reason more conservative Arab societies limit the occupations that women may have "lest, in the course of their work, they meet with situations that incur dishonor."[53] Both male and female actions are thereby effectively circumscribed, as various sectors of society must be segregated by gender. Activities requiring public visibility must be limited to men: most occupations, most economic dealings, and all political and military activities.[54] Education must be segregated by sex as soon as students approach adolescence, and all female activities, such as household and agricultural chores, visiting, and childrearing, must be private and carefully supervised.[55] The actions of men outside

the family may bring about loss of *ʿird* since inappropriate actions can cause doubt about the reputation of the family's women, even when the actions of the men are independent of the women's behavior; "the women may have done nothing to encourage the men, yet the men, by making advances, bring dishonor on the family."[56] Part of the reason for this may stem from what Antoun terms "the firm belief that women are the initiators in any illicit relations."[57] As a Moroccan woman put it in Daisy Hilse Dwyer's report, "women want nothing but sex. They are built that way; their minds are in their genitals."[58] The view of women as animalistic beings driven by inordinate sexuality and aggressiveness, potentially disruptive to society and threatening to the kin group and its honor perpetuates the belief in the modesty code, the function of which is to counteract the threat which women's sexual drives pose to society; as Antoun explains, "Only the full observance of the modesty code can, at once, protect the fragile woman, for she is a mirror that a breath will cloud, and contain the lust that dwells within her."[59]

*ʿIrd* is more a question of reputation than of fact. Public opinion becomes more important than what actually takes place. Thus, if observed by or known to others, a man's advances sully a family's honor even when the woman is blameless. As a result, in spite of the emphasis on virility, Dodd comments that "The conquests, boasting, and public behavior of Don Juan have few parallels in Arab literature or in Arab social reality."[60] Boasting of conquests endangers the social fabric because it forces the woman's family to punish her and the braggart. This aspect of *ʿird* seems to distinguish a society which

values honor of the *ʿird* type from one which values *machismo*, or male sexual prowess.[61]

This is not to say that the sex drive is regarded as weak; on the contrary, as a fundamental category of worldview, sexual drives are generally perceived as uncontrollable, so that society is safe from chaos only if the sexes are secluded from one another. Proper role fulfillment is an essential factor contributing to family *ʿird*, for as Deaver writes

> Being defined as female includes the duty of avoiding shame (sexual impurity) thereby maintaining the honor of the family. Being male involves the duty of protecting the honor of the group by respecting female kinsmen [sic] and protecting them from outsiders.[62]

From the perspective of the proverbs, in fact, being honorable or noble (*hurra*) in itself makes a woman invulnerable in much the same way it does a man (see pp. 141-142), although of course the composition of nobility is different for man or woman. In any case, it is said that "A free honorable woman can walk among myriads"[79,80] without fear of molestation or dishonor. The paradox inherent in this statement is that an honorable woman would not walk unaccompanied among myriads in the first place except under the most extreme circumstances, as one facet of honorable behavior for women in traditional society is voluntary seclusion from the public arena.

*ʿIrd* belongs primarily to a family's males; says Dodd, "being themselves the *ʿird* of men, women (wife-mother, sister-daughter) have no *ʿird* of their own...."[63] The women do, however, take responsibility for observance and enforcement of the code. They watch for violations

and frequently urge the father or brother to do his duty and protect *ʿird* in case of a violation. The control of women's chastity is not a question so much of moral conscience as of social conscience.[64] As with other points of honor, it is not whether one's behavior is honorable or shameful that is crucial, but what society believes. Modesty, that is lack of public displays of any kind, is so vital to maintenance of *ʿird* and avoidance of gossip that a proverb says "An immodest woman is like saltless food"[81].

The definition of manhood and beliefs about male honor are closely allied to the meaning of womanhood and female modesty. Virility is an essential attribute of manhood; a man who is incapable of consummating his marriage is said to be "like a woman" or possibly *marbūt* (bound) by the spell of a jealous person, or possessed by a jealous *jinnīyya* (female demon). Exploitative and protective activities are regarded as elements of manhood[65]; women, in contrast, are considered to be legally and economiclly inferior to men. Consequently, their honor, property, and lives are subject to exploitation by men. It follows that women must be guarded, and the modesty code is designed to provide protection.[66] The *ibn ʿamm* (FBS) is the closest male blood relative who can both legitimately exploit the labor and, more importantly, the sexuality of a woman and still be the guardian of his own *ʿird* through protecting her. This duality of the FBS-FBD relationship appears to be the most important motivation for the stated preference for FBD marriage in Arab culture.

A woman "represents the family in its aspect as a moral corporation through her reputation for modesty," writes Antoun, while a man

maintains his and his family's honor in large measure by protecting the modesty of his female relatives.[67] The values of virility and modesty, which are parts of the definition of manhood and womanhood respectively, cannot be understood independently as the two concepts are "inverse and complimentary," in the words of Abu-Zahra.[68] Furthermore, the roles played by these concepts in assessing the individual shackle the behavior of both sexes:

> The whole institution of modesty of women can be fully understood only in relation to the values of both male and female and to the lack of individual freedom for both in Arab countries. Whether they like it or not women have to pretend that they are modest and men have to pretend that they are virile. A man may find that bachelorhood is congenial but he has to marry in order to avoid accusations of effeminacy or homosexuality. Similarly, a woman has to conceal her sexuality, but ironically enough, this emphasizes all the more her difference from men and enhances her femininity. It creates more fears and more challenges for men, since according to social values men have to prove their masculinity, and so women have to defend their modesty.[69]

Abu-Zahra suggests that modesty may also function "as a means whereby men can maintain their image of virility," since the unrestricted right of women to mix freely with men and assess their sexual capabilities might make men feel insecure.[70] Nawal el Saadawi writes that sexual experience is a source of pride and a mark of virility for a man, a source of shame and degradation for a woman. She observes that

> Ignorance about the body and its functions in girls and women is considered a sign of honour, purity and good morals and if, in contrast, a girl does know anything about sex and about her body, it is considered something undesirable and even shameful. A mature woman with experience and knowledge of life is looked upon as being less worthy than a simple, naive and ignorant woman. Experience is looked upon as almost a deformity to be hidden, and not as a mark of intrinsic human value.[71]

Premarital virginity is the proof of ignorance and imexperience and therefore of successful seclusion of females by their relatives.

The dichotomous gender expectations for males is that they protect females to whom they are related and attempt, through women to whom they are not related, to dishonor other men. Female nature is also seen as two-sided; the woman needs protection in the shape of her male kin but is also dangerous to them since her misconduct, particularly when sexual, would negate the men's *ʿird* (sexual honor) and bring upon them *ʿār* (sexual shame). Men, because they are vulnerable in this way, intensify their efforts to seclude their female relatives and guard their chastity. Gulick proposes two key considerations in this area. First, seclusion and veiling of women constitutes a behavioral complex which has evolved over centuries which provides "a system of controls asserted over otherwise uncontrollable reality."[72] Second, although the relationship pertaining between the sexes in the Middle East has long been portrayed as one of male dominance/female submission, the validity of that portrait is open to question. The fact that female sexuality is regarded as a threat to men belies the complete submissiveness of women. In addition, a number of female saints and culture heroes are important in the Arab World. There is also evidence that women can and do achieve dominant roles in their secluded domestic milieu and may, within that context, consciously and effectively insert themselves into the "public" activities of their husbands and male agnates: "women may become powerful persons, even though they appear to be in submission to male-enforced seclusion."[73]

Deaver's research on Saudi women supports Gulick's points. Deaver found that male and female in the Saudi view constitute equal but qualitatively different categories which cannot be logically ranked; "They are not comparable and, therefore, cannot be scaled relative to each other. To impose Western categories of inferiority/superiority on them makes no sense."[74] Saudi men interviewed for Deaver's study did not regard women as innately inferior but rather as vessels of family honor and therefore due respect, honor and consideration. Saudi women do not consider themselves inferior to men. Part of their status is a function of their male kin but this does not constitute inferiority nor subordination since the male's status depends on the purity of females. Seclusion is seen by women as a way to purity which maintains family honor and thereby creates security.[75]

Sexual offenses, regardless of how minor they may be, tarnish *ʿird*, and once lost it cannot be regained except with removal of the offender and the lapse of a long period of time. Rape is thus considered more humiliating than homocide. Although the offender is usually executed, this is insufficient to eradicate *ʿār* (sexual shame) so that the girl herself may be put to death in very traditional areas, especially if it is thought that intercourse took place with her consent. Among Bedouins, her disgraced kinsmen usually leave the traditional homeland and migrate in voluntary exile to a region where their *ʿār* is unknown.[76]

A woman who violates the conventions of *ʿird* will become the object of gossip and her relatives will be taunted. It becomes encumbent upon her agnatic kin to dispose of or punish her; the enforcer

of the rules is usually her father, brother or *ibn ʿamm* (FBS), but he may be "urged on by the older women of the family."[77] Dodd points out that the husband of an adultress cannot impose punishment other than divorce and recovery of bridewealth[78] (unless he is a member of her patrilineage), although he may retaliate against her lover. If he kills his wife for aultery and she is not a member of his patrilineage, the husband is subject to retaliation or payment of bloodwealth to her kinsmen, since the woman's behavior does not affect the *ʿird* of the husband in the same way in which it affects her lineage. Marriage removes a woman from the sexual control of her father and brothers and places her under the control or "cover" of her husband, but this does not sever the connection between the woman and her lineage's *sharaf* (general honor), so that, should she damage her husband's *ʿird* (sexual honor) she simultaneously damages her lineage's *ʿird* as well as their *sharaf* and that of her sons, since a man's sons, Meeker explains, "receive their father's and ascendants' *sharaf* by virtue of their father's *ʿird* in relation to their mother."[79] An Arab brother relies on his sister's husband to "cover" or "control" the woman, while the husband depends on the woman's brother to respond to sexual insults directed at his wife or transgressions committed by her; "The brother, by protecting his *sharaf*, protects the *ʿird* of the husband. The husband, by protecting his *ʿird*, 'covers' the *sharaf* of the brother."[80] The *ibn ʿamm* (FBS) is outside the boundaries of incest but within the folds of the patriliny, and thus occupies a unique position in regard to his *bint ʿamm* (FBD). His *sharaf* is virtually identical to that of his FBD's father and brothers and so his interest in guarding her sexuality, and

thereby his *ʿird*, is as strong as theirs. So important, in fact, is his position as potential husband and protector of a woman's family's *ʿird* that, in traditional Arab societies, a woman cannot marry another man without the permission of her *ibn ʿamm*.

Bedouins of pre-Islamic Arabia practiced female infanticide by live burial, which has been explained variously as a means of reducing competition for food in the scarcity of the desert,[81] as a birth control method which reduced fertility,[82] a means of preventing potential fertility from falling into strange hands,[83] and as a means of safeguarding the family's *ʿird* from the girl's future misbehavior or kidnap.[84] The Qurān forbids female infanticide (Sūras 81:8-9; 31:7; 151:6), but it is reported that it "in fact persisted up to the present era in the Arabian Peninsula and, with changes of form, in the adjacent area."[85] The proverb "When a girl begins to menstruate, get her married or bury her" [92] harkens back to the pre-Islamic practice, although the girl in the proverb is considerably older than the infants who usually suffered this fate. This proverb also evokes two "coverings" for *ʿird*: marriage and the grave. A Palestinian saying referring to the accidental death of daughters refers to the grave precisely as proverbs 86 and 87 refer to marriage: "The death of girls is a covering"[90]. Similarly, the brother's *ʿird* is covered by his sister's grave: "My sister's death is of great fortune to me"[100].

The overall portrait of women and girls *vis-à-vis* a man's or a family's honor, then, is essentially negative and defensive (see Table 5). Modest, honorable women are, naturally, the preferred marriage partners [82,83,84] and shameful women unpalatable [81]. Threats to

TABLE 5

PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN THE PROVERBS

| Positive | Neutral or Qualified | Negative |
|---|---|---|
| gladness [96]<br>eulogizer of her father [95] | invulnerable if honorable [79,80,83]<br>undesirable if immodest [81]<br>desirable if of noble origin [83] | must be guarded or or "covered" [85, 86,88,90,92,100]<br>source of shame [88]<br>source of worry [89,93]<br>unprofitable [94]<br>stranger to natal family [97,99, 104] |

honor and consequent worry come to men through their daughters [83,88, 93,94]; honor is safeguarded by the death of daughters [90,91,92] and sisters [100]. Marriage is also a "covering" for girls [86,87,92], although it may not eliminate worry [89] and death may be preferable [91]. "The raising of daughters is a losing proposition"[94] although "S/He whose first child is a daughter is gladdened by God"[96; cf. 97] and will be remembered to people after death [95]. Honor is of itself some protection for a woman [79,80] although it is, because of its vulnerability to gossip, more fragile than the woman herself.

## "Two-thirds of a secret sin":

## Secrecy and Privacy

Secrecy is the greatest of all guardians of honor. Many "unacceptable" behaviors -- illicit sex, alcohol consumption, and so on --

occur with considerable regularity in even the most conservative of Arab Muslim societies, but they are hidden for the most part and therefore the perpetrators are shielded from the shame of their actions. Honor may be considered as a sort of curtain which separates the individual from the rest of mankind; the Arabs do in fact use the expression *hataka al-ʿird*, "to tear the *ʿird* (honor)" as one might tear a veil, and *hatika*, from the same root, means "dishonor."[86] Yet the essential veil is privacy or secrecy; what is not publicly known cannot incur shame, and this is one of the most fundamental differences between traditional Middle Eastern and Western behavior patterns.[87]

The proverbs are overwhelmingly favorable in their attitude toward secrecy as a concealor of shame (see Table 6). The traditional Arab house, which is built around an inner courtyard or is surrounded by a wall, is visually and physically inaccessible to strangers, and therefore a concealor of shame [58] and nakedness [59]. Even the black hair tent of the Bedouin is inaccessible to outsiders since by convention any stranger must approach from a particular orientation to the tent and announce himself at a recognized distance. Since the women's

TABLE 6

SECRECY IN PROVERBS

| Positive, Honorable | Impossible | Negative, Shameful |
|---|---|---|
| conceals shame [58,59, 60,61,74]<br>pardons sin [62]<br>insures some freedom of action [70,72,73] | nothing is secret [65, 66]<br>secret acts known by their results [67, 68,69] | belongs to the Devil [63]<br>poisenous [64] |

quarters (*harīm*) is physically separated by partitions in both the sedentary dwelling and the tent, there is a double shield for honor, because any outside males who are admitted will be entertained in the male, semi-public area without access to the private area where *ʿird* (sexual honor) resides.

The act of leaving the home places a person in jeapardy and a proverb declares this in extreme terms: "He who leaves his home loses his dignity"[60]. Darkness also provides protection from scrutiny: "The night covers shame"[61].[88] The advantage of all this concealment is that public judgments cannot be made without public awareness; thus "Two-thirds of a secret sin is forgiven"[62]. Yet the insidiousness of this philosophy is also recognized by folk wisdom: "What is hidden belongs to the Devil"[63] and "Under veils is deadly poisen"[64].

In the interest of preserving the public image and reputation, the advice given by the proverbs is that any shortcomings or problems a person has should be kept strictly private: "Pass by your friend hungry but do not pass him naked"[70]; by the same token, finding an enemy naked and thus with his weaknesses exposed is an advantage [71]. Concealment of weakness or difficulties should be maintained despite the cost, according to the proverbs: "Keep it in your heart though it wounds rather than let it be known and cause a scandal"[74] and "If your mouth is full of blood, do not spit it out in front of anyone"[75, 76]. If a person should wish to deviate from the dictates of society, then it should be done in ways that cannot be seen; one should "Eat whatever you like but dress as other people dress"[72,73]. Conformity to acceptable conduct in a sense then permits some freedom of individual

action so long as it is completely concealed from the public eye and shame.

All this secrecy is culturally attractive, but five proverbs suggest the futility of concealing scandals: "She who conceives in secret gives birth in public"[67; cf. 68,69]. In other words, even the most intimate and well-hidden of acts will eventually become public knowledge, for "Only that which does not occur is kept secret"[65,66].

NOTES

[1]Numbers in brackets following the proverb translation indicate the number of the proverb in the Appendix.

[2]Ahmed Abou-Zeid, "Honour and Shame Among the Bedouins of Egypt," ed. j.g. Peristiany, *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 245-246.

[3]Anis Frayha, *A Dictionary of Modern Lebanese Proverbs* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1974), 408.

[4]Nadia Abu-Zahra, "On the Modesty of Women in Arab Muslim Villages: A Reply," *American Anthropologist* 72 (1970): 1087.

[5]Couplet sometimes used in welcome by Bedouins of Kuwait. H.R.P. Dickson, *The Arab of the Desert*, 2nd ed. (London: Allen and Unwin, 1951), 118.

[6]*Ibid.*

[7]Abou-Zeid, "Honour," 254-255; Dickson, *Arab*, 134-135; Alois Musil, *Arabia Deserta* (New York: American Geographical Society, 1928), 441.

[8]*Ibid.*

[9]Musil, *Arabia*, 441.

[10]J1183 Execution escaped by invoking laws of hospitality; P320 Guest given refuge. Murderer of man's father takes refuge in his house and is saved by him. See Victor Chauvin, *Bibliographie des ouvrage arabes*, Vol. 2 (Liège: H. Vaillant-Carmann, 1892), 198 (No. 31).

[11]Abou-Zeid, "Honour," 258.

[12]*Ibid.*

[13]*Ibid.*, 255.

[14]*Ibid.*

[15]Dickson, *Arab*, 127.

[16]Abou-Zeid, "Honour," 258.

[17]Dickson, *Arab*, 127.

[18]Abou-Zeid, "Honour," 255; Dickson, *Arab,* 127.

[19]Abou-Zeid, "Honour," 255.

[20]*Ibid.*, 249.

[21]Dickson, *Arab*, 135.

[22]John Lewis Burckhardt, *Arabic Proverbs; or, The Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, 3rd ed. (London: Curzon Press, 1972).

[23]*Ibid.*, #346.

[24]Abou-Zeid, "Honour," 258.

[25]Sherri Deaver, "The Contemporary Saudi Woman," ed. Erika Bourguignon, *A World of Women: Anthrpological Studies in the Societies of the World* (New York: J.F. Bergin, 1980), 26.

[26]Musil, *Arabia*, 49.

[27]Abou-Zeid, "Honour," 258.

[28]*Ibid.*, 252.

[29]*Ibid.*, 253.

[30]A much greater proportion of proverbs in the collections deal with relatives but without specific reference to honor and shame.

[31]Frayha, *Dictionary*

[32]Richard T. Antoun, "On the Modesty of Women in Arab Muslim Villages: A Study in the Accomodation of Traditions," *American Anthropologist* 70 (1968): 680.

[33]For this reason, although homosexual activity is not condoned in Arab society, the active partner in such a union is not evaluated as negatively as the passive partner, since the active "male" role is compatible with masculinity in the culture. The passive partner is viewed completely negatively, since he assumes a passive, submissive, "female" role.

[34]Morroe Berger, *The Arab World Today* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1962), 105.

[35]John Gulick, "Village and City: Cultural Continuity in Twentieth-century Middle Eastern Cultures," ed. Ira M. Lapidus, *Middle Eastern Cities* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969), 130.

[36]The inferiority/superiority dichotomy with respect to men and women may be somewhat erroneously applied by Westerners. However, men wield authority (i.e., public influence) while women tend to be restricted to private power.

[37]Gulick, "Village," 130.

[38]The *burqu*$^{c}$ consists of a piece of black gauzy fabric which covers the forehead, a strip of cloth between the eyes and one down each temple, and suspended from these another piece of fabric covering the nose, mouth and cheeks. The *bushīyya* is a solid piece of black gauze of variable weight covering the whole face. The *$^{c}$abāyya* is a black cloak covering the head (not including the face) and the body, falling to ankle or foot length.

[39]Abou-Zeid, "Honour," 256. See also Sheila K. Webster, "*Harīm* and *Hijāb*: Seclusive and Exclusive Aspects of Traditional Muslim Dwelling and Dress," *Women's Studies International Forum* 7 (1984): 35-41.

[40]Antoun, "Modesty," 679.

[41]B. Fares, "'Ird," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed., Vol. 4 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978), 77.

[42]*Ibid.*

[43]*Ibid.*

[44]Jane Schneider, "Of Vigilence and Virgins: Honor, Shame and Access to Resources in Mediterranean Societies," *Ethnology* 10 (1971): 18.

[45]Judith Stiehm, "Algerian Women: Honor, Survival and Islamic Socialism," ed. Lynn B. Iglitzin and Ruth Ross, *Women in the World: A Comparative Study* (Santa Barbara: Clio Books, 1976), 229.

[46]Abou-Zeid, "Honour," 253.

[47]*Ibid.*

[48]*Ibid.*

[49]Peter C. Dodd, "Family Honor and the Forces of Change in Arab Society," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 4 (1973): 44.

[50]*Ibid.*, 45.

[51]*Ibid.*

[52]*Ibid.*

[53]*Ibid.*

[54]There are, of course, exceptions, and a few women do hold important political positions and many women fight when necessary, as during the Algerian revolution or in Palestinian resistance. These are, however, rare exceptions.

[55]Dodd, "Family," 46.

[56]*Ibid.*, 45.

[57]Antoun, "Modesty," 678.

[58]Daisy Hilse Dwyer, *Images and Self-images: Male and Female in Morocco* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 3.

[59]Antoun, "Modesty," 690-691.

[60]Dodd, "Family," 44.

[61]*Ibid.*

[62]Deaver, "Contemporary," 39.

[63]Dodd, "Family," 45.

[64]Michael E. Meeker, "Meaning and Society in the Near East: Examples from the Black Sea Turks and the Levantine Arabs," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 7 (1976): 261.

[65]Jamil M. Hilal, "Father's Brother's Daughter Marriage in Arab Communities: A Problem for Sociological Explanation," *Middle East Forum* 44 (1970): 82-83.

[66]Antoun, "Modesty," 690.

[67]*Ibid.*, 680.

[68]Abu-Zahra, "Modesty," 1086.

[69]*Ibid.*, 1086-1087.

[70]*Ibid.*

[71]Nawal El Saadawi, *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World*, translated by Sherif Natata (London: Zed Press, 1980), 44.

[72]John Gulick, *The Middle East: An Anthropological Perspective* (Pacific Palisades, CA: Goodyear Publishing, 1976), 210.

[73]*Ibid.*, 211.

[74]Deaver, "Contemporary," 39.

[75]*Ibid.*, 40.

[76]Abou-Zeid, "Honour," 256.

[77]Dodd, "Family," 44.

[78]Abou-Zeid, "Honour," 257.

[79]Meeker, "Meaning," 391.

[80]*Ibid.*, 391-392.

[81]Robertson W. Smith, *Kinship and Mrriage in Early Arabia* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1903), 153-155; 294.

[82]Gideon M. Kressel, "Sorocide/Filiacide: Homocide for Family Honor," *Current Anthropology* 22 (1981): 143.

[83]See the following entries in bibliography: Barth, 1954; Lewis, 1961; Cuisenier, 1962; Peters, 1963; Barclay, 1964; Cohen, 1965; Marx, 1967; Rosenfeld, 1968; Aswad, 1971; Schneider, 1971.

[84]Abou-Zeid writes that "It may also be significant that the way of ending a long feud is for the aggressor to give one of their girls in marriage to the wronged party, not as compensation but as a sign of good faith, manifest in the act of entrusting them with such a precious 'part' and symbol of their honour." "Honour," 254.

[85]Kressel, "Sorocide," 143.

[86]Fares, "'Ird," 77.

[87]Cf. Edward T. Hall, *The Silent Language* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1958), 92-93.

[88]Context is also important in the use of this proverb, since *ʿayb* can also mean blemish or imperfection.

# CHAPTER VI

# CONCLUSION

Underlying this analysis is the fundamental assumption, common to virtually all folkloristic and anthropological analyses, that there is a definite and significant interplay between folkloric expression and the sociocultural milieu in which it is created or adopted, preserved, and performed. The data for this study consists of 115 proverbs[1] culled from the 10,332 items included in the ten collections utilized. One might expect, in light of the importance of the honor/shame complex in Arabic culture, that a large number of proverbs would be concerned with the subject. This proved not to be the case, at least in terms of literal expression, as only 115 items, or 1.1% of the total corpus, are explicitly concerned with honor, shame or very closely related components of those attributes, such as generosity/stinginess, good/bad reputation, family, and so forth (see Table 7). However, it is important to note that a large number of proverbs do deal with cultural elements peripheral to the honor/shame complex but without specific mention of honor or shame. For example, in Westermarck's Moroccan collection, only .35% of the proverbs explcitly mention honor or shame, but 43.25% deal with closely related subjects such as women, marriage, love, sex, relatives, friends, neighbors, retribution, forgiveness, courage, boasting, and so on.[2] Thus the apparent shortage of proverbs on the subject cannot be taken as indicative of its lack of importance in the culture nor of its

TABLE 7

NUMBER OF PROVERBS ON HONOR, SHAME AND RELATED SUBJECTS

| Collection | General honor, shame | Generosity, hospitality | Gossip, reputation | Revenge | Wealth | Privacy, secrecy | Friends, associates | Women | Daughters, sisters | Family, relatives | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Burckhardt Total: 782 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 |
| Jewett Total: 291 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| Singer Total: 169 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Westermarck Total:2013 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 7 |
| Champion Total:1303 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| Dickson Total: 40 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Frayha Total:4248 | 25 | 11 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 13 | 1 | 7 | 10 | 4 | 79 |
| Abdelkafi Total: 100 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Mahgoub Total: 900 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 10 |
| Gabril Total: 486 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 5 |
| 10,332 | 38 | 12 | 3 | 5 | 3 | 19 | 3 | 14 | 13 | 5 | 115 |

non-appearance in folklore, since proverbial opinions are expressed on the elements which contribute to the honor/shame complex. Furthermore, without contextual data on proverb use there is no way to determine whether these items are in widespread and/or frequent use, or what metaphorical proverbs are used in reference to honor and shame when contextually appropriate. In addition, other genres of folklore may well concern themselves with honor and shame.[3]

The percentages of proverbs in the collections which are explicitly concerned with honor and shame are surprisingly consistent in view of the geographical and temporal distances covered by the collections (see Table 8). Proportions range from o to 1.8% of total items mentioning honor or shame. Two collections, Dickson's from Kuwait and Abdelkafi's from Libya, contain no proverbs on honor or shame. There are no apparent correlations in terms of either time frame or geographical location, which is consistent with the notion of the Arab World as a Culture Nation (see pp. 38-43).

Of the proverbs which do deal with honor/shame and their attendant concepts, the highest percentage, 33.4%, are general comments on honor and shame (see Table 9). Proverbs on privacy and secrecy account for 16%, followed by those on women in general, daughters and sisters, generosity and hospitality, revenge and family, wealth and friends. Despite the consistency in terms of total numbers of proverbs mentioning honor and shame across collections, there is virutally no inter-collection correlation in terms of the specific subject matter of the proverbs (see Table 10). It is impossible to reach any definite conclusions on the basis of such a small number of proverbs, although we may

TABLE 8

PROPORTIONS OF COLLECTIONS DEALING WITH HONOR/SHAME

| Collection | # of items | # of items on honor/shame | % on honor/ shame |
|---|---|---|---|
| Burckhardt | 782 | 6 | .75 |
| Jewett | 291 | 3 | 1. |
| Singer | 169 | 1 | .6 |
| Westermarck | 2013 | 7 | .35 |
| Champion | 1303 | 4 | .3 |
| Dickson | 40 | 0 | 0 |
| Frayha | 4248 | 79 | 1.85 |
| Abdelkafi | 100 | 0 | 0 |
| Mahgoub | 900 | 10 | 1. |
| Gabril | 486 | 5 | 1. |
| | 10,332 | 115 | 1.1 |

TABLE 9

PERCENTAGE OF PROVERB CORPUS ON SPECIFIC TOPICS DEALING WITH HONOR/SHAME

| General honor, shame | Generosity, hospitality | Gossip, reputation | Revenge | Wealth | Privacy, secrecy | Friends | Women | Daughters, sisters | Family, relatives |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (38) | (12) | (3) | (5) | (3) | (19) | (3) | (14) | (13) | (5) |
| *33%* | *10.4%* | *2.6%* | *4.4%* | *2.6%* | *16.5%* | *2.6%* | *12.2%* | *11.3%* | *4.4%* |

TABLE 10

PERCENTAGE OF PROVERBS ON SPECIFIC TOPICS FROM THOSE ON HONOR/SHAME

| Collection | General honor/ shame | Generosity, hospitality | Gossip, reputation | Revenge | Wealth | Privacy, secrecy | Friends, associates | Women | Daughters, sisters | Family, relatives |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Burckhardt | 66.5 | 0 | 0 | 16.5 | 0 | 16 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Jewett | 33.3 | 0 | 0 | 33.3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 33.3 | 0 | 0 |
| Singer | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Westermarck | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 14 | 0 | 43 | 29 | 14 |
| Champion | 25 | 25 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 50 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Dickson[2] | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Frayha | 32 | 14 | 4 | 4 | 2.5 | 16.5 | 1.5 | 9 | 13 | 5 |
| Abdelkafi[2] | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Mahgoub | 50 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 10 | 0 | 20 | 10 | 0 |
| Gabril | 40 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 40 | 20 | 0 | 0 |
| | 0-66.5 | 0-25 | 0-4 | 0-33.3 | 0-2.5 | 0-50 (100) | 0-40 | 0-43 | 0-29 | 0-14 |

[1] one item = 100%.

[2] No proverbs in collection deal with honor/shame.

tentatively suggest that the results point to the possibility that while the honor/shame complex holds relatively constant importance throughout the Arab World, the elements which bear most strongly on it may vary in importance from place to place. With the foregoing factors in mind, let us move now to some summary remarks on the messages conveyed in the proverbs and their relationship to other ideational and behavioral aspects of the culture.

## Substantive Meaning

Since this study concerns literal, as opposed to metaphorical, proverbs, the initial step toward understanding is to determine the substance -- the manifest message[4] -- of the proverbs in regard to honor and shame. Chapter V illustrates the decidedly positive evaluation of honor and the negative view of shame in the proverbs. Honor is associated with the qualities of physical beauty, influence and power, invulnerability, and freedom, while shame is linked to decapitation, disaster, ruin, lack of love, apostasy and insipidness. Possession of honor clearly enhances both the public- and self-images of the person; shame degrades and injures.

Seven broad sources of honor are cited in the proverbs: family origin and the accidental death of a female relative (sister or daughter) are passive means of acquiring and/or retaining honor. Manliness, secrecy, generosity, vengence, correctness, and "covering" of female relatives through marriage or execution preserve or increase honor in more active ways. Shame, in contrast, results from ten broad types of actions or states of being, seven of which directly parallel the sources of honor (see Table 11), including family origin, unmanly behavior, questionable reputation, stinginess, failure to take vengence when required, committing errors, and immodest behavior of female kin. Mention is made of three additional sources of shame which have no honor-inducing opposites among these proverbs; these are lack of modesty and/or self-respect, treachery or abandonment of the family, and money.

## Conditional Meaning in the Proverbs

The essential conditional message expressed in the proverbs is that honor is a positive attribute which may be obtained or preserved by way of active or passive behaviors, states of being, and familial relationships. The opposite of honor is shame, a negative attribute which may also be accrued or retained through active or passive behaviors, states of being, and familial relationships. Manliness, incorporating as it does the characteristics of courage, chivalry, generosity and honor, is the measure of "goodness" for males in Arab culture; as "they" say, "It is lawful to decapitate him who is not moved by manliness"[1].

TABLE 11

SOURCES OF HONOR/SHAME IN THE PROVERBS

| Sources of Honor | Sources of Shame |
|---|---|
| 1. Manliness (*murū'a*): masculinity, valor, chivalry, generosity. | 1. Unmanliness: complaining, shameful actions. |
| 2. --- | 2. Self-praise, lack of modesty, submissiveness, lack of self-respect. |
| 3. Secrecy. | 3. Shameful talk, gossiping, being gossiped about. |
| 4. "Covering" female kin with marriage or death. | 4. Daughters. |
| 5. Origin, family. | 5. Origin, family. |
| 6. Generosity. | 6. Stinginess. |
| 7. Taking revenge. | 7. Lack of defender. |
| 8. Correctness. | 8. Errors. |
| 9. --- | 9. Treachery; leaving home, family. |
| 10. --- | 10. Money. |

For women it is vital to be honorable, in the sense of being "worthy of honor" -- modest and of good personal and familial reputation -- in order to enhance and insure the honor of male agnates. In contrast, dishonorable behavior is evaluated negatively. For men, shame consists of a deficiency in the attribute of *'muru'a* (manliness) as well as "shameful behavior"[18] and "complaining"[17], and for women, of failure to guard their modest reputations by exposing themselves to gossip. The person who fulfills the code of honor -- who comes from honorable origins, fulfills gender role expectations, veils errors and weaknesses from the public eye, and defends personal and family honor -- is deemed beautiful [2,3], powerful [5], invulnerable [6,79,80], and free [15,16]. Transgressors of the code are disenfranchised from religion [25] and love [39] and are associated with death [1], shame [18], disaster and ruin [21,22], stinginess [39], vulnerability [40], and treachery [47,101,102].

One major discrepancy which appears in the proverbial content is between the positive evaluation of generosity and the negative evaluation of money or wealth, which are associated with lack of character [55] and dishonor [56,57]. Several interpretations of this disparity are possible. One is that great wealth can be attained only through devious means -- perhaps dishonesty, perhaps simply miserliness -- and thus he who acquires riches is dishonorable. Another meaning could be that one who acquires wealth becomes spoiled and abandons his honor for worldly pleasures. A third interpretation, the one which seems most likely, is that money *per sé* is not shameful, but its possession must be accompanied by generosity, which "covers shame"[37,38].

## Context of Cultural Meaning

The final issue to be addressed with regard to meaning in the proverbs concerns their relationship to other elements of their cultural context. Specifically, how closely do the substantive and conditional messages of the proverbs coincide with the ethnographic data *vis à vis* honor and shame, and how do they relate to other elements of culture to compose larger interrelated configurations?

Ethnographic evidence indicates a concern in Arab societies with nine categories of action and/or states of being mentioned with respect to proverbs (see Table 12); the only category of concern for which no supporting ethnographic evidence is forthcoming is the very one which is in itself somewhat inconsistent with other proverbial attitudes, i.e. money. Indeed, there is little if any sign of antipathy toward money in the culture; if anything, acquisition of wealth and the material possessions, education and power it affords has become a common goal in the Arab World.

Sources of honor and shame which emerge from ethnographies, then, are highly consistent with those cited in the proverbs. The components of *murū'a* (manhood) are encouraged and praised. Bravery and chivalry are extolled and encouraged as elements of honor, but attacks against poor or weak opponents incur shame for the attacker. Self-respect is essential to gaining public respect, but excessive boasting usually brings on criticism. A clean reputation of both the individual and the family are vital; a smudge on the name can be disabling or even fatal, physically or socially, especially for a woman. Aside from the independent reputation of the family as a group and of its members

TABLE 12

SOURCES OF HONOR AND SHAME

| Sources of | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Honor | | Shame | |
| Proverbs | Ethnographies | Proverbs | Ethnographies |
| 1. Manliness. | 1. Bravery, chivalry, honor at great expense. | 1. Unmanliness, complaining, shameful actions. | 1. Attacks on poor, weak. |
| 2. --- | 2. --- | 2. Self-praise, lack of modesty, submissiveness, lack of self-respect. | 2. --- |
| 3. Secrecy. | 3. Reputation. | 3. Shameful talk, gossiping, allowing gossip. | 3. Reputation. |
| 4. Marriage, death of daughter, sister. | 4. Relatives, potency/fertility, protection of modesty, chastity. | 4. Daughter, sister. | 4. Relatives, sexual knowledge, impotence/barrenness. |
| 5. Origin, family. | 5. Standing rel. to other groups. | 5. Origin, family. | 5. Standing rel. to other groups. |
| 6. Generosity. | 6. Generosity. | 6. Stinginess. | 6. Stinginess. |
| 7. Revenge. | 7. Revenge. | 7. Lack of patron. | 7. Lack of patron. |
| 8. Correctness. | 8. Correct behavior. | 8. Errors. | 8. Incorrect behavior. |
| 9. --- | 9. Loyalty to family. | 9. Treachery, leaving home. | 9. --- |
| 10. --- | 10. --- | 10. Money. | 10. --- |

based on their behaviors, the status of the family relative to other groups affects the degree of honor accorded them, a variable not mentioned in the proverbs.

With particular reference to the honor and reputation of women, ethnographic data provides the cultural context necessary to comprehend the proverbs. Chastity, sexual inexperience and ignorance, and fertility are basic to a woman's proper role fulfillment in traditional Arab culture. Although some change has occurred in the past generation or two and ever more women are being educated and are assuming positions outside the home, for the vast majority of women the fundamental expectations still pervade; even for "modernized" or "westernized" Arab women, a chaste reputation and motherhood remain necessities of life. For men, the protection of modesty and reputation of female relatives is vital, and the ability to father children contributes to honor. Procreational expectations, perhaps to a larger extent than other factors, are relatively equivalent in importance for men and women since potency/fertility are opposed to impotence/barrenness in the framework of traits contributing to individual honor and shame respectively. The proverbial emphasis on "correctness" and avoidance of "errors" may, in fact, be highly relevant in the context of gender roles; a Saudi doctoral student reports that in the Abha region of Saudi Arabia, for instance, a girl or woman who behaves in a fashion deemed silly or inappropriate is derided as a "penis" since males are expected to behave that way but females are not.[5]

The desirability for a man to be able and willing to avenge himself or his family when wronged is borne witness to by the long and

massive literature on blood feud and the elaborate system of blood money among Arabs, particularly Bedouins. Revenge is but one way of displaying loyalty to family and lineage, and such loyalty is expected beyond question. Disloyalty to or abandonment of the family is so abhorrent as to be virtually unimaginable.

Finally, generosity and hospitality are highly valued and developed traits, richly documented in ethnographic records of Arab societies. The consummately generous man is he who literally gives until it hurts, materially or emotionally. Such an individual martyrs his comfort, happiness, or financial well-being for the sake of his reputation as a host, thus enhancing his honor and that of his family. Shame falls on anyone who fails to be generous or hospitable or, in the case of the nomads, to grant the rights of refuge, face, and neighborhood. Here again, the proverbs are in full agreement with real culture.

Meaning in the proverbs meshes not only with behaviors recorded in the ethnographic literature but also with organizational aspects of culture to create the interrelated configurations of institutional context.[6] Religion, particularly Islām, permeates Arab society, exerting an influence on secular as well as sacred spheres of life at all social levels. The Great and Little Traditions influence nearly everyone to greater or lesser degree, depending upon a number of variables, including location, educational level, social level, sectarian affiliation, family pressure, and personal bent. Proverbs mention God as the only confidant of the honorable man [17], equate boasters with Satan [20], and view the dishonorable person as one without religion; these views all rest on the assumption that religiosity is a given of a decent life.

Family provides the most fundamental group affiliation, regardless of whether the individual is part of an extended or nuclear family. The interdependence of the individual and the family is mentioned in proverbs which show both the group effect on the individual [101,104] and the individual effect on the group [105], and the consequences of disloyalty are said to be nakedness [103] and humiliation [102].

Marriage is the norm for both women and men; virtually everyone marries. Girls tend to marry younger than men, which is consistent with the proverbial view of marriage as a "covering" for girls [86,87]. In the other proverbs about marriage, the institutions of marriage and family mix as men are advised to select a wife according to her lineage [82,83,84] and then to guard her modesty [85]. In fact, the modesty code is omnipresent in Arab society, and has generated such subordinate institutions as the veil and seclusion as alternative "coverings" for women.

Should the individual elect to break the modesty code, then discretion is the watch-word; secrecy and privacy negate the consequences of immodesty [61,62]. Architectural conventions are among the most obvious manifestations of emphasis on privacy. Houses built around courtyards or surrounded by solid walls, with no physical or visual access points other than a door which can be closed, and elaborate window grills which permit outward but not inward vision are still the most common dwelling types throughout the Arab World, and they do indeed "cover nakedness" [58,59].

Hospitality is institutionalized more or less rigidly among different social groups, but even those who are relatively far removed

from the traditional environment tend to maintain the traditions of hospitality and generosity. Arabs will virtually come to blows for the right to pay the check in a restaurant, and usually innundate guests with food, drink and kindness. Certainly the proverbs are inclined favorably toward generosity. The only negative sentiment expressed is that such goodness perhaps exposes the host to dishonorable intentions of a "dirty guest" [45], but here the over-generous host is not so much maligned as warned.

In the event that the above-mentioned measures fail in their missions, the final major institution of traditional Arab culture comes into play. Revenge is extracted where controls fail, and follows the formula basically of "an eye for an eye" or equivalent compensation. Where Islāmic law prevails, and to a large extent where secular judicial systems have been instituted, sentences against criminals in the Arab World tend to be punitive rather than rehabilitative. The proverbs fully support this stance.

## Oppositions in the Proverbs

By opposing positively valued elements of life mentioned in proverbs to those negatively valued, it becomes clear that, in the folklore as in the ethnographic evidence, the characteristics of manliness, nobility and similar related concepts (Table 13, Category 1) are unambiguously positive while their alter-egos are consistently negative. Similar consistency is found for modesty (Category 2), women who fulfill or fail to fulfill their expected roles (Category 3), marriage (Category 4), revenge (Category 10), error (Category 11, and gossip (Category 12).

TABLE 13

OPPOSITIONS IN THE PROVERBS

| Positive | Negative |
|---|---|
| 1. Manliness.<br>Chivalry.<br>Beauty of character/disposition.<br>Nobility, honorability of man.<br>Death/poverty with glory/honor.<br><br>Being unashamed.<br>Self-respect. | 1. Shame, disgrace.<br>Shameful actions.<br><br>Lack of honor.<br>Humiliating victory, life in disgrace.<br>Lack of self-respect.<br>Submissiveness. |
| 2. Modesty. | 2. Complaining.<br>Immodesty, boasting. |
| 3. Honorable woman.<br>Woman of noble origin. | 3. Immodest woman. |
| 4. Marriage. | 4. --- |
| 5. Daughters.<br>Death of daughters.<br>Death of sisters.<br>Sons.<br>Son's son. | 5. Daughters.<br><br><br>Daughters.<br>Daughter's son. |
| 6. Family. | 6. Family.<br>Abandoning family. |
| 7. Secrecy. | 7. Secrecy.<br>Being gossiped about. |
| 8. Generosity. | 8. Excessive generosity.<br>Stinginess.<br>Treachery against (former) host |
| 9. --- | 9. Money, wealth. |
| 10. Revenge. | 10. Being undefended. |
| 11. --- | 11. Error. |
| 12. --- | 12. Gossip, shameful talk. |

Money and wealth (Category 9) are also unambiguously criticised, although the reasons are not entirely clear (see p. 186).

A number of ambiguities do appear in other areas, however. Proverbs referring to daughters, for example, provide some interesting contrasts. While the majority of proverbs dealing with daughters are nagative, items 95, 96 and 97 cast a more positive light on girl children. There is a discrepancy between Westermarck's and Frayha's variants of proverbs 96 and 97, and Westermarck may in fact be in error in both his transcription and interpretation of the proverb as ethnographic evidence indicates that *women* often prefer to have a daughter as the first child since she will be able to assume responsibilities at an early age for household chores and care of younger children, particularly boys, who do not assume such duties.[7] Yet the death of daughters is deemed a happy event, and where there is a choice, son's are preferred to daughters, as the son's son is preferred to the daughter's son. Certainly many an Arab father loves his daughters, but evidence shows that sons are preferred and the the potential of daughters to dishonor the family is feared and guarded against. Daughters, then, are not undesirable in and of themselves, but are less desirable than sons and are perceived as both a joy and a danger.[8]

The family is also seen in two lights in the proverbs; it is a source of honor and of shame, a refuge and a threat, an aid and a nuisance. Families and the obligations they impose are treated ambiguously in everyday life as well for, although it is rare to hear a complaint about the burden of fulfilling family obligations, all sorts of

strategies are devised by which some measure of individual freedom can be garnered.

Secrecy, finally, appears to be regarded as a necessary evil, necessary to safeguard the reputation [58,59,60,61,62], nearly impossible to maintain [65,66,67,68,69], and potentially evil [63] and dangerous [64]. The emphasis on preventing gossip does in fact encourage a two-pronged concern in Arab societies with what people are doing and what they say about what the individual is doing.

## Conclusions

The elements of culture -- proverbs, behavior, institutions -- examined here are consistent in content except when dealing with daughters, family ties, and secrecy. In these areas, where there are emotional ambiguities in the culture, there are also ambiguities in proverb content. This is not to say that proverbs exist in order to resolve the conflicts,[9] but rather that they do, as a body, express the cultural ambiguities and provide people with a traditional means of supporting either side of the argument. The English translations used for this study appear to render accurately the traditional Arab view of honor and shame as integral elements of human worth. Further research is needed to discover the relationship of proverb content to other folkoric genres[10] and to other modes of expressive culture as well. Finally, investigations of proverb *corpi* from other culture areas and their portrayal or lack of portrayal of honor and shame whould help to determine which aspects of the honor/shame complex as expressed in

Arabic proverbs are in fact specific to Arab culture and which are part of a wider context of honor-bound and other societies.

NOTES

[1]Some collections include variants of the same proverb. Such variants are listed in the Appendix as a single item and all sources noted. For the purposes of calculations, each culled item was counted separately. Hence the Appendix contains 105 items while the total count is 115.

[2]Sheila K. Webster, "Women, Sex and Marriage in Moroccan Proverbs," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 14 (1982): 173-184.

[3]For example, El-Shamy collected a ballad in Nubian Egypt which focuses on sorocide for family honor. Hasan M. El-Shamy, "The Ballad of the Gergite or Shafiga and Mitwalli," unpublished translation.

[4]Robert Plant Armstrong, "Content Analysis in Folkloristics," ed. Ithiel de Sola Pool, *Trends in Content Analysis* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1959), 153.

[5]Abdulrahman al-Shamrani, personal communication.

[6]Richard Bauman, "The Field Study of Folklore in Context," ed. Richard M. Dorson, *The Handbook of American Folklore* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 364.

[7]Daisy Hilse Dwyer, *Images and Self-images: Male and Female in Morocco* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 88.

[8]Women in general are perceived in much the same way in Arab culture; they are loved and revered when controlled in relation to the male ego by such factors as immaturity, kinship, or invisibility.

[9]The functionalist view of folklore as problem-solver is expressed in numerous works. See, for instance: Ruth Benedict, *Zuni Mythology*, 2 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935); Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth," *Structural Anthropology*, translated by Claire Jacobson and Brooke Gundfest Schoepf (New York: Basic Books, 1967).

[10]This relationship has been termed "the context of communicative systems." Bauman, "Field Study," 365.

# APPENDIX

## THE PROVERBS

Key: Following each proverb, the source is given as follows:

Initials of collector: # of proverb in that collection: country of origin.

Thus (AF1715L) means Anis Frayha, #1715), Lebanon.

### COLLECTIONS

JB - John Burckhardt, *Arabic Proverbs*
JJ - James Richard Jewett, "Arabic Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases"
AS - A.P. Singer, *Arabic Proverbs*
EW - Edward A. Westermarck, *Wit and Wisdom in Morocco*
SC - Selwyn Gurney Champion, *Racial Proverbs*
HD - H.R.P. Dickson, *Arab of the Desert*
AF - Anis Frayha, *A Dictionary of Modern Lebanese Proverbs*
MA - Mohammad Abdelkafi, *One Hundred Arabic Proverbs from Libya*
FM - Fatma Mahgoub, *A Linguistic Study of Cairene Proverbs*
JG - Jan Gabril, *Lebanon: Proverbs and Maxims*

### COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN

L - Lebanon
E - Egypt
M - Morocco
S - Syria
K - Kuwait
I - Iraq
B - Libya
D - Sudan

## GENERAL PROVERBS ON HONOR AND SHAME

1. It is lawful to decapitate him who is not moved by manliness. (AF1715L)

رَاسِ اَلْ ما بِتْحَرَّكُه اَلْمَرْوَة قَطْعُه حَلال

2. A young man's beauty (lit. sweetness) in life [is from] three [things]: manliness, chivalry, and generosity. (AF1458L)

حَلاوَةِ الشَّب فِي الدِّنيا ثَلاثِة : اَلْمَرْوَة وِالْفُتُوَّة وْكَفِّ السَّخا.

3. The beauty (lit. sweetness) [of a person] is the beauty of [his] disposition. (FM116E)

— —

4. The beauty of the face [derives] from the beauty of character. (AF1271L)

جَمَالِ اَلوِجّ مِن جَمالِ اَلْأَخلاق .

5. The shadow of a noble (lit. generous) man is wide. (AF2291L)

ظِلِّ الْكَرِيم فَسِيح .

6. An honorable man is honorable even though harm befalls him. (JB117E)

الحُرّ حُرّ و لو مسّه الضرّ

7. Poverty (lit. soot) rather than shame, gray hair (i.e., old age) rather than disgrace. (AF1991L)

إلشَّحَار وَلَا الْعَار ، إلشَّيب وَلَا الْعَيب .

8. Better to lose without disgrace than to win with humiliation. (AF2532L)

غِلب بِسِتْرَة وَلا نَصر بِفَضِيحَة .

9. The death of a youth in his glory is like his wedding, and his life in disgrace is like his funeral. (AF3912L)

مَوْتِ الْفَتَى بِعِزُّه مِثْل عُرْسه، وعِيشْتُه بِالذِّل مِثْل عَزَاه

10. Hellfire rather than shame. (JG436L)

النار ولا العار .

11. Die with honor rather than live disgraced. (AF3910L)

مُوت بْشَرَف وْلا تْعِيش ذَلِيل .

12. Die the son of a whore rather than live disgraced. (AF3907L)

مُوت إبْن فَحْبة وْلا تْعِيش ذَلِيل .

13. Death rather than commit a base act. (AF3904L)

ألْمَنِيَة وْلا الدْنِيَة .

14. [I would live on] ten [pieces of] celery rather than degrade myself. (AF941L)

بْعَشْرَة (بْخَمْسة) كْرِفس وْلَا بْهِينك يا نَفْس

15. [He] who does not feel ashamed does what he wants. (JB643E)

مَن لا يستحي يعمل ما يشتي

16. If you are unashamed then you can do what you like. (FM40E)

ʔiðа lam tastahi, fa ṣnaʕ mā šiʔt

17. Complaint to other than God is humiliation. (FM150E)

ʔaššakwa li ɣayr-i llāhi maðalla

18. Shame on him who does shameful [things]. (AF2469L)

عَيب عَ اللِّي يْعَمْل عَيب .

19. At the examination, a man is either honored or disgraced. (AF2440L;FM571E)

عِنْد الْإمْتِحان يْكْرَم الْمَرْء أوْ يْهان .

20. No one praises himself but Satan. (AF3308L)

ما بيشكُر نَفسُه إلّا أبليس.

21. If modesty becomes rare, disaster prevails. (AF145L)

إذا قَلّ ألحَيا حَلّ (عَمّ) البَلا.

22. If modesty departs, ruin arrives. (JG15L)

إذا ذهب الحياء . حلّ البلاء .

23. He has plucked out the roots of modesty. (AF2656L)

قاطِع شِرشِ ألحيا.

24. The roots of modesty have dried up in him. (AF2247L)

طَقّ مِنُّه شِرشِ ألحيا.

25. He who has no honor has no religion. (JJ267S)

il mā lu šiʾ mā lu dīn

26. He who never errs is never disgraced. (AF540L)

إلّي ما بِزِلّ ما بِذِلّ.

27. To each scholar there is an error, and to every charger a false step. (FM678E)

likulli ʿālimin hafwa wa li kulli gawādin kabwa

28. Nothing humiliates the soul but one soul dominating another. (AF3292L)

ما بِهِين النَّفس إلّا حِكم نفس عَ نَفس.

29. He who has not died, his potential for shame is not past. (AF596L)

إلّي ما مَات عَيبُه ما فات.

30. He who lets himself become chaff, the cows will eat. (JB636E)

من صير نفسه نخالة اكلته البقر

31. He who mixes himself with bran, the chickens will eat. (AF465L)

إلّي بيخلط حالُه مَع النِّخالِة بتاكُلُه الدّجاج

32. If you make yourself bran, the chickens will scratch you. (AF489L)

إلّي بيعمل حالُه نخالة بتبخبشه الدّجاج.

33. He who enhances himself, the people will enahnce, and he who makes himself dung they will defame. (AF3801L)

مِن جَمّل نَفسُه جَمّلتُه النّاس، ومِن زبّل نَفسُه أنداس

34. Honor yourself to find yourself.(AF2367L)

عِزّ نَفسَك تجدها.

35. He who does not respect himself, people will not respect. (AF555L)

إلّي ما بيحترم نَفسُه ما بيحترمُه النّاس.

36. Honor dwells in the forelocks of horses.[1] (SC115E; JB453E)

العز في نواصي الخيل

## GENEROSITY AND HOSPITALITY

37. Generosity covers shame. (AF2862L; SC87E)

ألكرَم ستّار العيوب.

38. There is no shame that generosity cannot hide. (AF3404L)

ما في ولا عَيب إلّا وألكرَم غطّاه.

39. Stinginess exposes one's shame and cuts love from hearts. (AF824L)

ألبُخل كاشف ألعيوب وقاطِع ألمَحبّة مِن ألقلوب

40. I dishonor you, piaster, rather than dishonor you, myself. (AF1022L)

بهينَك يا فِلس وما بهينِك يا نَفس.

41. He who dishonors his possessions honors himself. (AF29L)

42. Dishonor your money rather than dishonor yourself. (AF4083L)

هِين فِلسَك (قِرشَك) ولا تهِين نَفسَك.

43. Dishonor you possessions rather than dishonor yourself. (AF4084L)

هِين مَالَك ولا تهِين حَالَك.

44. [Too] much generosity is foolishness. (AF2864L)

ٱلكَرَم كتِير جنُون.

45. Too much welcoming brings in a dirty guest. (AF2833L)

كِتر ٱلتَّرحِيب.يلقِي الضَّيف ٱلوسِخ.

46. Protect yourself against the evil of him to whom you have been kind. (AF68L)

إتَّقِ شَرَّ مَن أحسَنتَ إليه.

47. Shame on him who drinks from a well and throws a stone into it. (AF2468L)

عَيب عَ ٱلِّي يِشرَب مِن بير وبيرمي فيه حَجَر

## GOSSIP AND TALK

48. Shameful talk is like belching. (AF1452L)

ٱلحكي ٱلمعيب ضرَاطِ ٱلتِّم.

49. You talked, you farted; would it not have been better had you not talked? (AF1453L)

حكيتِ قمَطتِ، يا رَيتك (ما حكيتِ) سكتي

50. He said:"Shame on him who backbites people." [The other] said: "Shame on him who lets people backbite him." (AF2667L)

قال: عَيب (يلعَن) عَ ٱلِّي يِتكَلَّم بحَق النَّاس.

قال: عَيب عَ ٱلِّي يخلِّي النَّاس تحكِي بحقُّه.

## REVENGE

51. Dishonored is he who has no insolent [defender]. (JB89E)

ذل مَن لا سفيه له

52. To take revenge is no dishonor. (JJ76S; AF114L)

أَخذِ التَّار مِش مِعيَار.

53. He who steps on your foot, step on his neck. (AF467L)

إِلّي بِيدعَس عَ رِجلَك أدعَس عَ رَقبتُه.

54. He who spits on your palm, spit on his beard. (AF448L)

إِلّي بِيبزُق بِكَفَّك أبزُق بِدَقنُه.

## WEALTH

55. Money and character cannot be together. (AF2627L)

فلوس وَنَامُوس ما بِكون.

56. Dishonor is in wealth. (FM175E)

?il$^{9}$izz-i bahdala

57. To become rich is associated with dishonor. (AF2544L)

ألغِنى مَقرُون بِالذِّل.

## PRIVACY AND SECRECY

58. O my house, O my little house, O concealer of my shame. (AF4166L)

يا بَيتي ويا بُوَيتاتي ويَا مُستَر عَيباتي.

59. My house covers my nakedness. (EW279M)

داري كتستور عري (عراي)

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داري كتستور عري (عراي)

60. He who leaves his house loses his dignity. (AF3813E)

مِن خَرَج مِن دارُه قلّ مِقْدارُه.

61. The night covers shame. (AF3243L)

إلْلَيل سَتّار ٱلعُيوب (كِلّ وَيل).

62. Two-thirds of a secret sin is forgiven. (AF1543L)

خَطِيّة ٱلْمَسْتُورَة تِلْتينْها مَغْفُورَة.

63. What is hidden belongs to the Devil. (AF3647L)

ٱلْمخَبّى (ٱلمخْفِي) لِلشّيطان.

64. Under veils is deadly poisen. (AF1155L)

تَحْتِ ٱلْبَراقِع سَمّ ناقِع.

65. What is hidden? That which does not occur. (AF2061L)

شُو ٱلّي بيخْتِفِي؟ ٱلْ ما بِصير.

66. Only that which does not occur is kept secret. (AF3299L)

ما بيخْتِفِي إلّا ٱلّي ما بِصير.

67. She who conceives in secret gives birth in public. (AF367L)

إلّي بِتحْبَل بِالسِّر بِتْخَلِّف بِالْمَجْمَر.

68. She who conceives on the oven will give birth in the threshing ground. (SC31E)

— —

69. Love and pregnancy and going up a mountain cannot be hidden. (AS3E)

الحب والحبل وطلوع الجبل ما يتخبا

70. Pass by your friend hungry but do not pass by him naked. (SC58E)

— —

71. To overtake your enemy when he is hungry is not as bad as to overtake him when he is naked. (AF621L)

أمْرُقْ على (عَن) عَدُوّك جُوعان ولا تِمْرُقْ عَلَيه عَرْيان

72. Eat according to your own taste and dress according to the taste of other people. (FM653E)

kul ma yiʕgibak, wi lbis ma yiʕgib innās

73. Eat whatever you like but dress as other people dress. (JB533E)

كل ما تشتيه نفسك و البس ما تلبس الناس

74. Keep it in you heart though it wounds rather than let it be known and cause a scandal. (AF1558L)

خَلِيها بِالْقَلب يِجْرَح وَلَا يِطْلَع لَبَرَّا يِفْضَح

75. If your mouth is full of blood, do not spit it out before anyone. (AF148L)

إذا كان ثِمَّك مَلَان دَم لا تِبْزُقُه ( تِبْصقُه ) قِدَّام حدا

76. Though your mouth is full of blood, do not spit it out in front of anyone. (AF680L)

إن كان ثِمَّك مَلان دَمّ لا تِبْزُقُه (تِبْصقُه ) قِدَّام حدا .

## ASSOCIATES

77. Honor's microbes are not infectuous. (AF3752L; JG435L)

ميكروب الشرف ما بيعدي .

78. Bad behavior is contagious. (JG208L)

سوءُ الخُلق يُعدي .

## WOMEN

79. A free honorable woman can stay among myriads [without behaving dishonorably]. (AF3659L)

اَلْمَرَة اَلْحُرَّة بِتِقْعُد بَيْن كُرَة .

80. A free honorable woman can walk among myriads without behaving dishonorably . (AF1382L)

حُرَّة بِتِمْشِي بَيْن كُرَة .

81. An immodest woman is like saltless food. (AF3657L; JG64L)

مَرَة بَلا حَيَا مِثل طعام بَلا مِلح.

82. Marry a woman of noble origin and sleep on a mat. (JJ168S; EW35M; AF1523L; FM393E)

خُذ أَصِيلة وَلَو كَانِت عَ ٱلحَصِيرة.

83. If you marry take a woman of noble lineage, the enemy will have nothing bad to say. (EW33M)

اذا تزوجت تزوج الاصول مايجبر العدو ما يقول

84. Follow the roundabout way though it may be long, take a noble wife though she has not been asked for. (AF1673L)

دُور الدَّوزَة وَلَو دَارِت، خُذ أَصِيلة وَلَو بَارِت

85. He who loves his wife should guard her. (EW80M)

ذحب حرامه يخفيه

86. A girl's covering is her marriage. (AF1887L)

سِتْرَة ٱلبِنت جَازِتها.

87. Marriage is a covering. (AF1232L; FM98E)

ٱلجَازِة سُتْرَة.

## DAUGHTERS AND SISTERS

88. Girls are the cause of shame and dishonor and they give the enemy access to the house. (AF1000L)

ٱلبِنت بِتجِيب ٱلعَار وٱلمِعيار وبِتدَخِل ٱلعَدُوّ لِلدَار

89. I married my daughter off so that I might not worry, but she comes back to me with four little ones behind her. (AF1300L)

جَوَّزت بِنتي لَإرتَاح مِن بَلاها، إجتِني وأَربَعَة وَرَاها

90. The death of girls is a covering. (Kressel, "Sorocide," p. 143).

mawt al-banāt sutra

91. The death of girls is fortunate even if they are brides (lit. have their trouseau ready). (AF3911L)

مَوْتِ الْبَنات مِن الْمَسْعَدات وَلَوْ كانوا (صبايا، عَرَايِس) مُجَهَّزات.

92. When a girl begins to menstruate, get her married or bury her. (AF1011L)

أَلْبِنْت مَتى ما جَرى دَمَها يا جازِتْها يا طَمّها

93. Worries about daughters continue until death. (AF4067L; FM792E)

هَمّ أَلْبَنات لِلْمَمات.

94. The raising of daughters is a losing proposition. (AF3654L)

مَرْبَى أَلْبَنَات مَرْبى خسارَة.

95. He who has no daughters the people will not know when he died. (EW164M)

الي ما عنده بنات ما يعرفوه الناس امتى مات

96. He whose first child is a daughter is gladdened by God. (EW163M)

الي يبدا الولدة الاولية بالفرج فرج الله عليه

97. The lucky woman is she who bears daughters before sons. (AF475L)

إِلي بِيسْعِدْها زَمانْها بِتْجِيب بَناتْها قَبْل صِبْيانْها.

98. Your son is yours, your daughter is not. (AF52L)

إِبْنَك إِنَك، بِنْتَك لأ.

99. The son of the son is a dear son but the son of a daughter is the son of a stranger. (AF34L)

إِبْن الإِبْن إِبْن الْحَبِيب، إِبْن الْبِنْت إِبْن الْغَرِيب

100. My sister's death is of great fortune to me. (AF3917L)

مَوْتَة إختي سَعادة لَبَختي.

## FAMILY AND RELATIVES

101. The honor of horses is in their stabels. (EW394M)

عز الخيل مرابطها

102. He who abandons his clan is humiliated. (AF3793L)

مِن تَرَك عَشِيرْتَه ذَلّ.

103. He who throws off his clothes shall find himself naked. (AF3791L)

مِن تَبَرّا مِن ثِيَابه يِعْرَى.

104. The shame of the son if from his family. (AF2470L)

عَيب ٱلوَلد مِن أهله.

105. The shame of the flock is from the shepherd. (AF2467L)

عَيب الرَّعِيّة مِن الرَّاعي.

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